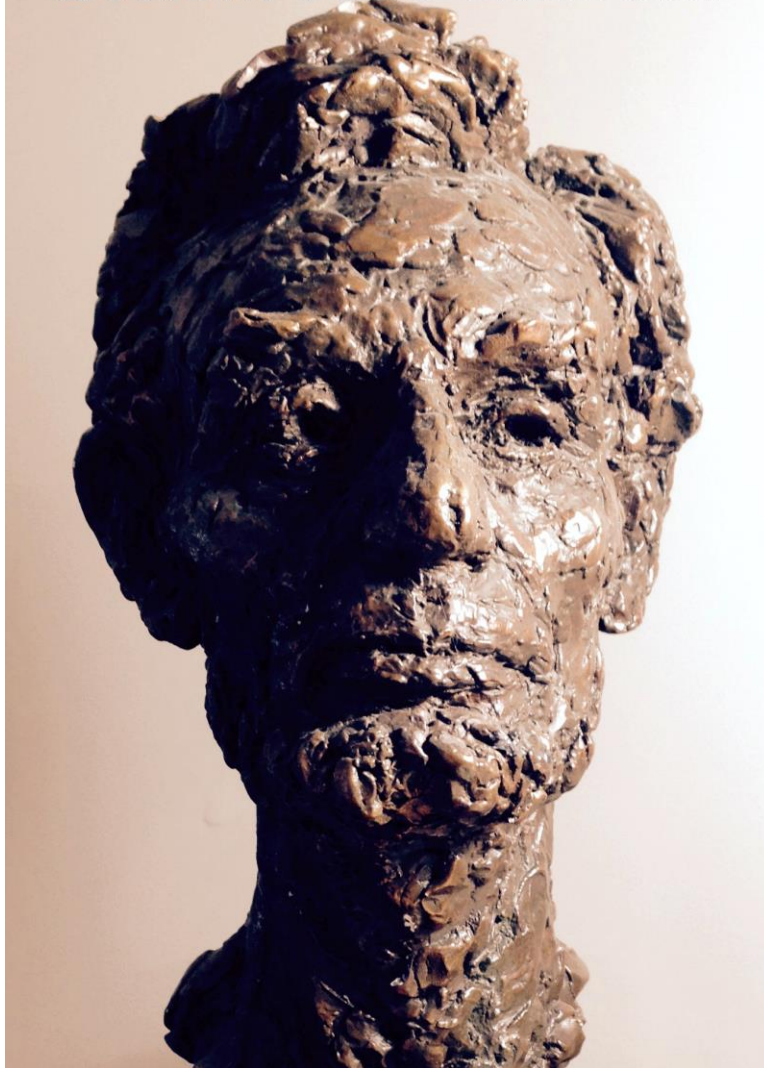


With Malice towards none... Abe Lincoln



Book

(Part 2?)

by Ken O. Eldib

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Th4e computer turned on at 3:45 AM and the man from zog started recording all new entries from Phil's hard drive that had been made that day. It was added to his dosiee and would come back to haunt him in his cryogenic future.

So who are we? And who are they? Aren't we all the same, don't we all have the same potential for good and for bad? Isn't that what they taught us?

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction...it's not just a law of physics, it's also a law of nature in a way...it applies to world events and peoples actions towards each other almost as much as it applies to atom and particles. It's like no justice no peace and all those other similar slogans...what goes around, comes around etc. But sadly, unlike in physics, there are enough exceptions that people don't take these words seriously, there are too many people that get away with murder and as a species we are too greedy to behave like particles or atoms.

Speak of the devil the radio said.

"I'm for Clinton, because I don't think he could do any worse than Bush and even if he does I don't care, let's get it over with if that's what it's coming to", Phil said meaning armageddon.

"I wonder if you're really right about all this stuff you say God has told you. Are you really as sure as you say you are that you know all the answers, or are you just hoping you're right, so you can have "crowns" and be able to keep saying I told you so. I can't help but think what I think since such questions have already been in people's minds. You haven't convinced me otherwise yet, and until you practice some of the mercy you preach, you never will. All you've done is judge me and if you get the power to, you'll no doubt carry out my sentence.

"What gives you the right to say that this and that is God "moving" or God's will. It seems more to me that when things are going your way, you call it God moving and when things are going against you or for your adversary, you call it the devil. Seems like you pretty much call it the way you want it, your pious protestations notwithstanding.

"All people want to be in control of their own lives", Clarence said. "The way to do this, often is to be in control of someone else's life, like a spouse, employee or slave."

"This obviously creates problems, unless the other person is extremely passive, in which case it still creates a problem, in the form of resentment."

"Men have been the victors, on the basis of several attributes that they generally possess more so than women. But women have been battling it out with men for control since the garden of Eden."

"Men have fought back for all these millenium, with their wits and other weapons, women have done likewise. The result has been the macho society, where men have made use their violent tendencies against women, for women and against other societies or elements in their society. The result is the "system", "establishment", "status-quo" or whatever else you want to call it. These allow a roughly symbiotic relationship between men and women and lower classes of people. A heirarchy, pecking order or whatever with the dominant man usually on the top, being henpecked to do more by the dominant woman. The means to carry this out is the classes they both dominate. The lower classes tolerate this barely or completely, depending on what negative or positive incentives are in it for them. Variations of this system includes democracies, communism, religions, cults, tribal systems and the rest of human societies that are trying to control their destinies and reduce the effects of entropy or chaos.

The old man was indeed old, Phil hadn't asked him exactly how old, but he was going to today.

"Don't look only at your own history books to learn about your own people. Look at your adversaries books too and gain new, different perspectives on the glory of you and your ancestors. Not flattering accounts, but if we want those we can look in our own books. Western man has nearly obliterated every culture he has come in contact with. He says it is Gods plan. An African pygmy was brought to the St.

Louis worlds fair to be part of an exhibit on the evolution of mn. He was along with eskimos, native americans like Geronimo and other "lessor" species displayed in native habitat. The thousands of The pygmy called the whites "Mizunga". Mizungas streamed past the pygmy's display and marvelled about the glory of the Mizunga race and the primitive ugliness of these lessor races.

The pygmy made it back to Africa and then as explained in a longer story, he came back to the U.S. He was once displayed in a cage with an orangatang in New York's Bronx Zoo, an apparent attempt by the zoo director to increase attendance. Later the pygmy committed suicide while leading a groups on a nighttime hunting trip. This was something he liked to do, but this time was different. As was his usual manner, he stripped down to his loincloth and danced in the darkness. As usual there was no one listening, none of the Mizunga could understand what was going on in his soul. His dance meant one thing to him and mostly another thing to them.

His sould cried out for a ticket back to his forest home in Africa. He had seen the news and he knew this day that their was not much he could do against the magical dirty machines of the Mizunga.

There were no Mizunga's listening and they held the key to his life in their cruel hands. His dreams could never come true in his life in his times, his day would not come in this life, where the Mizungas rulled. This day, he took a gun and as the story goes, put a bullet through his heart, they say that his soul went back to his old forest home that day.

"I've got no problem with women owning property, of course that's your right, I just have a problem with you owning my property, that I worked hard to buy with my money", Phil was as indignant as ever.

"You moron, we're married, that's our property, not yours", Sharon knew the law and was not reticent about explaining it to her husband. Turning to the mess on the coffee table, Phil tried to move their argument to a new subject, "why is it that you can leave crap scattered everywhere, but I can't?" Sharon had several travel brochures and women's magazines on the coffee table and the couch, but she wasn't intimidated or phased by Phil's chagrin. "Asshole", she nonchalantly defended, "look over there by your chair what's all that shit?" Sure enough, Phil also had a pile of magazines and assorted papers on the side table next to his recliner. "Well, at least I'm not anal about dust like you", he snorted, it was a last gasp at winning a loosing argument, but this time it was in vain. "Yeah, you don't care about a clean house, you'd be real happy in a pig pen, after all, you're not the one that has to listen to you snoring like a horse all night."

"Damn it!", Phil yelled, "let's get the heck out of here, I'm starving." Sharon continued to examine her outfit in the mirror, not ready to go yet, but didn't bother to answer her adversary. Not to be dismissed, Phil continued his tirade, "why is it that when you're ready to leave, the rest of us have to jump, but you expect us to wait patiently till then... what the hell's wrong with this picture?" Finally, she replied, "it's simple, when I'm happy everyone's happy, when I'm not happy, no one is...ha!"

They were reading the morning devotions and Phil was reading a part in the worlds of the mans who had wrote the devotion book. Paraphrased, it said that before the fall of Adam and Eve, their were no thorns or thistles on any branches and that lions and tigers did not harm other animals to get meat.

"That's fine if you ignore the fossil record", he muttered as he read on. Sharon, Joey and Sally listened to the devotion. Phil wasn't going to say anymore about the bit on thistles and tigers, but as it would happen, the author had included two questions about that in the study section. Because the auther was so insistent about teaching that evolution is bunk and that God suddenly made thorns grow and tigers bite.

"I'm not saying that he couldn't do that", Phil said to Sharon, "but I don't believe that he necessarily did it that way."

Sharon shot him a look of dismay, she considered his talk borderline blasphemy. Heck a few hundred years ago you could be burned at the stake for talking like that. In her neck of the woods it hadn't changed, you could still get killed for talking this way.

Phil saw her expression and reacted. "Hey, that's how I feel and I've got no problem with it."

It was kind of like the discussion on who to vote for with some people the other day, including Vaughn, if you weren't going to vote for their candidate, you were crazy and they tried to put an incredible shame and guilt trip on you.

"If you've got a problem with it that's your problem", he went on.

Sharon was kind, she didn't say anything else about it, unlike Vaughn and the boys who wanted to make their problem, Phil's problems too.

"If you ignore the fossil record", said Joey mischevously. Phil didn't know what the boy thought about all this talk. He was probably the only one out of the three siblings, to know what mom and dad were talking about.

The evangelicals that claimed that they and virtually they alone were responsible for the founding of the U.S.A., were a thorn. Why was it then, that three of the first six presidents of the U.S.A. were Unitarians. Unitarians now were under attack as practically the ultimate secular humanist pigs, just as the Unitarians considered the evangelicals as the ultimate in self righteous pigs. In the background the singers sang make love not war, sounds so absurd to me, or else our world will truly rest in peace.

If these two sides didn't learn to live with each others opposing views, then all hell would someday break loose, as it had regularly throughout history. Neither side could be all right, and neither could point any true historical evidence to place him as his brothers master.

Let Jesus handle it when he comes back, he many not consider us half as just as the just judges we think we are. We are more like the emporer in the emporors new clothes. The Ozzie song said something like ... "no use being sorry, it's something I enjoy, moma's feeling sorry, I've been a bad, bad boy."

The actress was on NPR touting lithium as the cure that saved her life from the hell of manic depression. At the end of the segment, the producers expressed their thank first of all to the pharmaceutical company that had been one of their sponsors. Phil didn't know, but he wondered, was this a ten minute "infomation" commercial for lithium or was it an important educational program. Was the pharmaceutical industry using this non profite forum to get as many people as possible on their drugs or were they actually providing an important service to the "three quarters of manic depressive people", that are as yet undiagnosed and living at times in a hell on earth caused by the disease.

"I'll put up with you for as long as you put up with me", Phil said, "at least I think I will."

They both required some putting up with and Phil was fairly determined that he should put up with her shortcomings for the good of the kids number one and for their own good number two.

"I'm already gone...", the Eagles song said, but to Phil it had a completely different interpretation.

"To me it means I'm already gonna die prematurely anyway, from lung cancer, heart disease, murder or whatever, so I might as well live life to the fullest as long as I don't directly, or directly indirectly hurt anyone else. Applied to women he'd be a carouser if he went by his natural instincts. He believed that this would be hurting his wife and kids, so he restrained himself as much as he could.

"That's not very smart and it's a terrible example to teach the kids", Sharon said, her feelings hurt by Phil's explanation of already gone.

"I'm different", said Phil. "I'm half you know what and I have a different view of the world than you. I believe less in your ideals like conspicuous consumption and love it or leave it than you do, they didn't succeed in brainwashing me as much as they did with you, but of course you just call me satanic because I don't see things your way."

"You're crazy, that's what I call you and maybe the devil is in you, I don't know and probably wouldn't care except for the kids", was her reply.

"I care about conservation and all that other stuff as much as you, you just use it as an excuse to cover up all the lies and evil you perpetuate", she went on.

"That may be", Phil lamented, "but I hope you're wrong." He continued to file the spoon's edge smooth and then returned it to the drawer.

Sharon wanted to buy another one, "I won't use that spoon."

"You may not be able to make enough money to give these kids a decent standard of living, but I can."

"There's no doubt, the battle lines are being drawn, liberal versus conservative, both calling themselves the party of God, however they define it, I'm fighting for neither of them, but only in self defense. And I don't believe I've got much more than a snowball's chance in hell."

"Your Sunday school classes have the atmosphere of political rallies and your political caucuses rock with religious fervor and rhetoric, it's all the same, we're all playing the blame game."

"Well you make it sound like you're a victim, but you're the victimizer", Sharon rebutted.

"My generation is hopeless", Phil said. "The best hope is today's younger generation, not all of them have been captured by the establishment of the world. My generation has laid down in bed with the whore of Babylon. We have grown fat, lazy, complacent and have become the enemy. The idealism of the 60's has been abandoned for democratic or republicanism, we have embraced the old status quo because it has promised us our own little acre of paradise if we'll follow like sheep and not question authorities ranging from the morals of the church to the morals of the president.

"I'm doing a survey to see who's the most self-righteous of all the religions", Phil told Vaughn.

"One related thing I've noticed is that everyone's lining up according to party lines. Battle lines are being drawn for religion wars, to go along with the constant battle of the sexes and the race war, which both fester constantly. I'd like to say that I'm staying out of it, but it's hard not to try to find a group to identify and find strength in numbers. Unfortunately, I'm one of those people that doesn't fit into any group. I'm still in my very weak self defense mode, which means me against the world. I don't like the current good old boy, patriarchal power structure because it oppresses everyone. But I'm not willing to

trade it for a matriarchal society or anything else, I'm holding out for nothingarchal society, in which a man or woman of any color can do what he want's unless he lays hands on another. Someone said give peace a chance, don't tread on me, Extreme, said it most recently.

When she found out about Phil's ciagrette butt collection and his standing on the corner panhandling with a homeless but not hopeless sign, Sharon made up her mind that he had gone completely mad.

For his part, Phil hadn't wanted her to know about that or the pain in his chest, but both secrets had been loosed.

At the end of the book, Phil learns that the old man is just that and not an angel.

He still believes that the government has no right to tell him what he can and can't put in his pipe, his glass or God's ground.

The republicans want to keep government out of big business, so that corporations can regulate themselves. At the same time they want government to regulate individuals personal lives. I thought the constitution and bill of rights protected the individual, but it looks like it protects the corporations.

Don't take your wife for granted and don't let her take you for granted.

A second later, a song with the line "it's so easy...like taking candy from a baby was playing on the radio and Phil's restless mind was thinking about how easy it would be pulling off his delivering the report late to the client trick. He would say that he had accidentally addressed the package to 20 Washington Street and not to the correct address of 220 Washington Street. Since Phil had already received the clients check and the report wasn't done, he would use this trick to gain a weeks time to work on the report and get it up to date. Then the song "Forever Young", which he had heard earlier in the day came to mind. He remembered the Biblical idea in it about "do unto others as you would have them do to you. Phil was ashamed of himself and felt guilty that he was lying to the client. He saw business somewhat like a war, which is also how the Americans perceived the Japanese as thinking. He wasn't sure if that were true of the Japanese or not, but it seemed to be true of him these last eight years. He wondered what the Japanese perception of American business ethics was and also their opinion of his ethics.

This is not a patriarchy, it is either a patriarchal matriarchy, or it's a matriarchal patriarchy. Evidence the way women have always manipulated men and witness the benefits and power that society offers to those women who marry highest and then take full advantage of it. No wonder, women are among the strongest backers of the status quo.

"You want a revolution! Don't you?", Vaughn accused Phil.

"Yeah a peaceful revolution, it such a thing is possible", Phil slobbered, looking up from his beer.

"That elderly neighbor lady, sure seems suspicious of me", Phil approached Sharon, "you haven't been feeding her information have you."

"All her subtle inuendos alluding to prohibition, revenue agents, new windows in garages and stuff, if I didn't know better, I'd think she suspects me of something."

"You guys want the right to privacy and non-invasion to be valid as long as their isn't some emergency reason to violate this and you want to be the ones to define the emergency. I'd like to know if there was a

fight between those of your ilk and those opposed when the constitution and Bill of Rights were proposed", Phil continued his argument. Just keep hanging out at your stonehenges and pyramids and saying that you are speaking for God, he'll come for you as surely as he'll come for anyone else.

"It's either true or it's not", said Phil, "I don't know and I don't accept your choice as being "the" choice and law over me."

"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine", REM says. Some of you out there don't feel fine to find that the yoke you've had on us for the longest time is about to be lifted.

"No use calling, cause I know I'm falling and I'm getting pretty near the end ... it's the new mother nature taking over, ...", The Guess Who.

The deal for the mexican had not gone down and Phil was desperate. He had no money and his lungs were aching, he wondered if this was the end of the line. Did he have lung cancer, if so, then all this was a mistake, all he had been arguing for was wrong.

He also was broke, he wanted smoke badly, but he knew he couldn't afford any at the moment. He had one bowl of domestic left and planned on surviving for three or four days off of half a cigar he had found in Chicago last week. He would bong it, "if", that is "when" the cravings started getting to him to put some tar in his lungs.

Upon a little reflection, he was glad the shit was illegal. If he could go around smoking cigars of it, he would have been dead of cancer or heart disease years ago. Being illegal, it was too expensive and too risky to do that. The counter argument he could think of to that, was that there were thousands of men and women rotting in jail because it was illegal.

He was being selfish as usual, but really he still wished it were not illegal, so he could make the choice himself about ruining his life. It was pretty apparent at this point that he had done himself in by the choices he'd made. He wouldn't be seeing the kids growing up and the younger ones wouldn't even remember him. From his point of view that was one of the big downers of it all, that and the fact that he wouldn't be around to try and help raise them. On the other hand, he was grateful that he had at least been able to be around them for the years they did have together. Sharon was still pretty and no doubt could find a good new husband out there who would support and raise the kids at least as well as Phil would have.

"I'm an addict and a criminal", Phil wrote to the kids.

He wished that one way or another it wasn't that way, but in this world that's the way it is. He just wanted them to know that if they were smart they'd avoid the pit he had fallen into. Outside it was rainy and gloomy, the

"I'll definitely advise you to avoid those mistakes, but I'll also advise you to throw away the tight schedule that you keep. Don't let the world run you like a rat through a maze.

Phil cupped his left ear with both hands and it seemed he could hear better from it. Then he tried cupping a hand to each ear and noticed an even greater improvement and somewhat different type of improvement. It seemed logical to him, after all he was increasing the sound-gathering outer ear surface by about five times. "

"That's ridiculous", Jack told him.

Phil's definition of an office was a place to hang out and hopefully make a little money. A job was something you do to make Enough to pay the bills. He like being self employed, because the office was his and he wasn't someone elses employee.

"Great", Phil said to himself as he pushed the button to hang up the speaker phone, "those guys would have to be slicker then shit to get their hands on that money now." He was referring to the money for the report that he had received and which he had transferred from his company saving account to the company money market account. He had sold a report that needed to be updated and which he hadn't finished renewing yet. He didn't want there to be any way that the client could stop payment on the check if they caught wind of what he was doing. The client was a hugh Japanese company and their name was the same as the bank upon which the check was written.

It was likely that bank could pull strings for it's sister company if necessary and being a huge international Japanese bank with offices in New York, it might bully the smaller U.S. bank that Phil held his company's savings account with. He didn't want that to be possible so he had decided to do a little financial juggling to get the money out of his local banks pocket and somewhere else where Fuji bank couldn't even find it. It was either this or spend it.

"What do you do when the same country is both protecting you and oppresing you", Phil asked. "You try to improve it without destroying it", Clarence said.

"Everytime you criticize and attack me, you are judging me, which as you may guess, I don't appreciate. Take care of the man in you mirror and the mote in your eye before you decide to accuse me of this or that."

"The only time I've ever flipped out on you", Phil told Sharon, "was the day you were screaming at me and grabbed me by the throat while I was sitting in my recliner. I got up and slapped you one time. Other then that I've never flipped out on you or tried to hurt you or be mean."

"You hurt me and the kids every minute of the day because of the way you live", she retaliated.

She believed her anger at his was rightful, he believed it was not. As a good, conscience mother she would do anything at all to get what she felt was best for her kids. Anybody who got in her path had better look out, especially in this day and age when a woman is able to ruin her husband in stead of the old fashioned way, which was just the opposite.

Phil didn't think that Sharon necessarily knew what was best for everybody and he wasn't going to give up without a fight, destroy him though she might. He felt strongly that he might be right and her and her ways wrong. She felt even more strongly that she and her values were the right ones and this gave her the impetus to be so bluntfully willing to bully and dominate. She didn't see it as bullying, though and believed that she was un mistakeably doing God's will and darn Phil if he reisted here will, which was the will of her Protestant forefathers and foreothers. The same iron will that had virtually conquered the world.

And she wondered why he hadn't made a move on her in weeks, why was he so cold, why was he taking care of it himself, with Rosie as Jackson Browne put it. She assured him that she knew exactly what he

was up to and how he was being selfish and unfair to her again. "What am I supposed to do?", she yelled at him, referring to her own need for sex. "What am I repulsive to you?"

The argument ended abruptly upon Joey's loud and tearful pleas for mommy and daddy to stop fighting. He was going to tell her that it was hard to want sex from her for several weeks after an outbreak of one of her attacks on him. He didn't know how she was wired, but his wiring made her not repulsive but definitely unattractive to him for a long time after each time she raked him over the coals. It was a violation, though she didn't know it or maybe just didn't care. Her attempts to control those in her universe where undying and in his opinion perverse. But that was what made the world go around in her circle, men running the world on behalf of themselves and their matriarchs. As long as they and everyone else did what they knew was right, everything was honky dory. If anyone was out of line, as always someone was, they must smash it down in the interest of God, country and the family. As a libertarian, Phil was squarely in their sights and all tyrants' sights.

The only way out thought Phil in his stubbornness was to call her bluff if it was one. He would have to demand that she hold absolutely no sway over him, which she could never accept without putting him through hell. It was the nature of both of them not to give in, so their battle of the sexes would not end in a truce anytime soon.

She had the advantage more than women had ever had it. They had superior numbers and they had most men on their side because their way was the best way for the status quo minded people who had already made their's and now wanted to preserve it for "posterity".

And it was all tied in to their religion and to the religion of any dominant group. To be rebellious against them was according to them to rebel against God and once they had made this judgement you were scum and must be destroyed. This had worked against every imaginable enemy over the millennium, since if you didn't think and worship to the powerful groups' pleasure, they'd make you bend your knee the way they wanted you to. In Phil's case the local Protestant churches were what Sharon and her powerful attended and demanded that the kids attend, claimed they had the inside track with God.

"It shouldn't be any more illegal to smoke it, then it is to smoke or drink anything else.

He couldn't get a clear answer or agreement from different churches on what a Christian is and how many of their criteria you had to meet to be one, he didn't call himself one. Unitarians on the other hand made it pretty clear, you follow the dictates of your conscience. He was therefore either a Unitarian Christian or neither and he didn't particularly care what name they called him. After all they were only human judges and could only kill you and your's once.

"I don't understand all this, but as of today and for now on", said Phil, "I believe that the Bible is all true and I fall down on my knees and ask Jesus for forgiveness and salvation." "So please show up and make it all right". His opinion changed however a year later.

He didn't agree with the way the Indians, Blacks, Jews and many others had been treated by these Christians, but he could find no fault with their message, just their actions. Later that would change.

Freedom Of Speech For Me But Not For Thee, was the title of a book mentioned on NPR, but Phil couldn't recall the author's name now that some time had passed since he heard it discussed. The radio show also mentioned a quote from a Holocaust survivor saying something like, the only solution for bad talking is more and better talking and ideas.

"I may or may not be the bastard that you always say I am, but I'll defend till the end my right to be whatever I am", Phil told Vaughn.

Men and women use each other equally for selfish reason, the purposes they use each other for are the main difference. So the guilt trips we put on each other aren't really so necessary and we can stop blaming each other for each other's problems after all.

"It's not my fault that you married outside of your species", Phil told her.

After the conversation with the elderly neighbor, Phil agreed with the man on some things. For example resentment toward people with the attitude towards the government of what have you done for me lately. He had however silently disagreed with the man's opinions on shipping every non-believer off to who knows where and lock up the rest of those who weren't living the way his people thought they should be living. Phil's personal concern was about what was the government going to do to him lately in their role as judge, jury and executioner.

These elderly people in the neighborhood seemed like they wanted to make sure that the laws of the land were enforced and Phil figured they would consider informing on outlaws like him their duty. Their intentions were good, but he didn't want to take the fall for them doing their duty to keep the world the way they thought it should be. As the elderly man had railed against everyone he wanted to crush, such as the welfare cheats, the rich, the environmentalists and God knows who else, Phil wondered if the old man got any social security benefits and if he knew that these accounted for the bulk of the country's debt. No doubt it wouldn't matter and the old timer would consider this sacred cow of his, his right no matter what, because of all the sacrifices he'd made and all the money he'd paid into the system.

"You'll probably leave me when I'm old anyway", Sharon said. "I might as well leave you now and get on with my life, maybe I'll find a good man out there somewhere." In her mind, she was picturing the perfect man and husband and he sure didn't look much like Phil.

"If I'm a good man, I'll stay with you forever, if I'm not I won't, but I don't think you increase my chances of being a good man by constantly telling me what a creep I am", Phil said in his defense. There were pressures from inside him, from Sharon and outside in society that sometimes helped those thoughts of unfaithfulness creep into both of their minds.

In his mind he was picturing some generic good man who had taken his place with Sharon and the kids. Painful images of all sorts filled his mind. He saw Mr. perfect in their bedroom, saw him in the treehouse with Joey and saw him on Phil's chair with Sally on his knee, they were not pleasant images. He hoped that they could work out their differences so that those images would never materialize. Sharon was tough though and she wanted him to change. She didn't seem to fear losing him, she knew she could find someone better. Phil knew he'd never find another Sharon.

Which reminded him somehow of the experiment he was conducting to try to turn on the left side or right side of his brain at will. He thought it was progressing well, but as his circle of friends kept telling him, it was all in his head.

Phil walked into the trading company office and looked across the tall marble receptionist's desk. "I'm here to see Mr. Tanaka".

"What is your name please", she said pleasantly.

"Phil Glencoe, from World Market Consulting", he told her.

She lifted the telephone and announced Phil's arrival to Tanaka. After a few words with Tanaka she put the phone down and ushered Phil into an adjoining meeting room.

"Would you like some coffee", the receptionist asked.

"Yes", Phil replied, "with just cream." He was looking the receptionist up and down and liked what he saw.

The room was appointed like most of the Japanese companies U.S. offices are appointed. Two luxurious chairs which the Japanese always sat in, facing a small couch where the guest was always seated.

Presently Mr. Tanaka walked into the room and greeted Phil, "Good morning Mr. Glencoe", he said. Like most of the many Japanese that Phil consulted for, Tanaka had a little difficulty with the "l" in Phil's name.

They exchanged pleasantries about the weather and the state of their business and the economy. In answer to Phil's inquiry, Tanaka spoke, "as you know the economy in Japan is very bad now, the stock market has dropped 60% in the last two years and now the U.S. government has imposed 50% tariffs on the steel that we import to the U.S."

Like most Japanese, Mr. Tanaka always was modest in appraising the success of his company and he never, ever had stated that things were going very well. Not even several years ago when Phil had met with him and the trading company was definitely making big bucks. It was a cultural thing with the Japanese to never brag about how they were doing, instead they always said things were very bad.

Now for once however, Phil believed that things were bad, the Japanese domestic economy was seriously stressed. They kept using the expression, "the bubble has burst", to describe the situation. The Japanese stock market and real estate markets had become so inflated that when they both crashed, many companies had lost half of the worth of their stock and real estate assets.

After a little more small talk they got down to business.

"Mr. Glencoe, as you know from our telephone conversation, I want to find out about how a certain company is making their new multi-grain snack chip".

The new multi-grain chips made by Frito-Lay, Keebler, Nabisco and others, were the latest item to be targeted by the huge Japanese trading company. The last thing Phil wanted to do was ruin this profitable new business for an American company and he could feel his heart skip a beat in reaction to hearing the nature of the project.

As usual, Phil tried not to illustrate his feelings on his face, he was pretty good at it and thought that he had been successful this time too. But he must have shown some reluctance on his face, at least Tanaka had read some. His face must have sunk a little or something, because he knew he hadn't blinked.

"Mr. Glencoe, you owe it us to collect the information", Tanaka wanted the data very badly and uncharacteristically he pressured Phil. "After all, don't forget who paid the bond to have you released from jail, before things got nasty for you in there".

"We need to know what machinery they are using to make their new multi-grain snack food chip", Tanaka said. "You know, what makes and models of machinery, their capacity, their throughput and ... if you can get it, their recipe formula".

Man's inhumanity to man is the world's biggest problem", Tanaka said "and his inhumanity to the earth is the next biggest problem". Yuji Tanaka was a unique man in many ways, he was intellectually gifted and also had a high moral character. He was knowledgeable in many areas both technical and philosophical. He never did anything underhanded, he let Phil and his kind do that, all he did was take advantage of the information they provided him with.

(Later Tanaka is the one who bails Phil out of jail. Phil says, "I guess I was too valuable to you to be left in jail". Tanaka replies, "not at all Mr. Glencoe, there are many consultants like you available to us, I have bailed you out for humanitarian reasons".

Phil takes advantage of being bailed out to murder Vaughn, because he thinks Vaughn will testify against him. Instead it is Sharon doing her moral duty that gets him sent back.

"Maybe the U.S. military will find a role as the world's paid police force, even though we claim to dread being paid mercenaries for nouveau rich nations."

The days presidential speeck regarding Somalia supported this in Phils mind.

"I have the worst wife and kids in the world", Phil ranted at his family. "I can't believe how selfish and ungrateful you all are. Look at all I've provided you with, how can you be such bastards to me!"

Phil had a habit of blaming everyone else for his problems, sometimes consciously and other times with out knowing it. In this case he was doing it consciously as a way to threaten them into complying with what he wanted.

That's very nice of you", Phil said, "but I'm going to say no thank you". The man inviting Phil to dinner was an evangelical and although Phil respected the man and his views, he declined the invitation. It was uncomfortable for Phil who was not a tea-totaler to dine and converse with people who totally rejected drinking. Phil always felt like he was being judge by the inviter, but really he was the one guilty of judging another person.

"Besides", Phil thought to himself. "I spend enough time in an evangelical church as it is." Sharon was a devout Christian and if it was up to her, they would be in an evangelical church or doing things with Christian friends every minute of the day. Phil on the otherhand was uncomfortable in such surrounding, probably because he had more sins to worry about then the average person in such a setting. He wondered what the truth about all this stuff was. He regretted that some called his questions and opinions blasphemous, but he had serious questions that no Chrisitan had answered for him yet. These were the questions that led to his opinions and he hoped that the questions could be answered or debated in an open, peaceful manner.

He had admitted that he was a sinner but no longer accepted Christ as personal savior, no longer believed that Jesus was the only way to salvation and he had been Baptized. Obviously he was not a Christian, did this damn his soul? He didn't know but the Christian community gave an answer to the questions. They said he was damned. Most however said that there were also a number of essential things you had to believe in order to be a saved Christian. For example that there was eternal

punishment in hell for the unsaved and that everything in the Bible was the inspired word of God. The list seemed to number about eight items, but Phil was not sure, since he had only seen such lists two times. Both were at evangelical churches and were lists of what the particular church believed in. As Phil understood it, the church might or might not ask you to confess that you believed their list in order to join their congregation. In his case he had been Baptized in an evangelical church but had not joined it.

If anyone asked him, Phil would have stated that the reason he didn't join was that he had questions about the churches doctrines. He would also say that he didn't feel that he was qualified to join, because of disgrace that he might bring on the church.

In reality though, these were excuses and his true reasons were more self centered. He was often afraid that everything they said was true and that he was in danger of the judgement and hell if he didn't stop smoking, lust, lying and doing all the other sins he was guilty of. If he embraced the church completely and didn't stop sinning, he would lose face publicly and especially with Sharon. As long as he didn't actually join the church he could hang on to what he believed was his intellectual license to sin.

Once he joined the church and fessed up, there would be no more excuses for continuing his evil ways. It was easier for him to take the path of least resistance and just continue his ways and not join a brotherhood of followers.

Phil laid the pipe down and turned on the computer. He needed to open the file on the fiberglass car part report before he called Sharon. He deftly pressed the keys on his keyboard and the computer's colorful screen flashed several times, finally ending up with the correct file displayed on the monitor.

Next he put on the telephone headset and pressed button number four on the memory pad section of the phone. The phone dialed the seven digits automatically and Phil set back in his seat, waiting for Sharon or her phone machine to answer. He was tipped back in chair, it's back coming to rest on the credenza behind him and his feet on the conference table that he used for his desk. The keyboard cord stretched several feet from the computer to his lap, where the keyboard itself rested on his lap.

Sharon answered the phone, "Hello?"

"Hi, honey", Phil said slowly. "I'm working on this fax to dad and I can't remember what we were going to suggest he get for Joey."

"You don't remember!", she said disappointedly. They had discussed it three or four times that weekend and she found it hard to believe that he could have forgotten so soon.

"We were going to tell him to get Joey a new video game", she said.

They discussed the subject a little more and then she asked, "anything going on there?"

She figured he had gotten stoned and was wasting the morning as usual, that's probably why he couldn't remember Joey's Christmas gift idea.

"Uh, not too much", he said, I've been working on the mailing for the fiberglass car part report. I think Mitsubishi and a couple other companies might buy it."

He looked at the computer screen which he had just opened, but which he yet to use.

Sharon wished she knew exactly what Phil was doing at work, she thought the worse, imagining him sitting there smoking all day long doing nothing. Phil didn't want Sharon to know exactly what he did how much smoking he did. He personally might not consider it excessive, but she probably would, so he refused to volunteer any information. She would have to figure that out for herself if she wanted, why incriminate himself un-necessarily he thought.

He was being deceitful, but the way he incorrectly saw it, was that he wasn't lying by opening up the screen and at least looking at it. As usual though, she was a step ahead of him and caught him in a direct lie anyway.

"Are you making follow-up calls or sending out letters", she asked.

Phil hadn't done or even contemplated either of these approaches yet, so he had no ready answer for her. "I've been sending out letters and I'm going to make some phone calls in a little while", he fibbed.

"Hey, by the way", he said trying to change the subject, "Chad paid rent today, but he had receipts for plumbing work worth \$265 and also has a client check that he can't cash till tomorrow for \$150 so were short \$415 on the rent right now."

"That's a bummer!", she replied. Sharon had told Phil that their bills that month were over \$3,000 so they were relying on the renters money.

"Yeah, there's a \$202 receipt for fixing the gargage disposer and one for a \$62 repair of the dish washer. I think they should pay for the \$62 bill, under that clause we have in the lease about repairs under \$100 being their responsibility."

"Yeah, I think so too", Sharon said determindly.

"The only thing", Phil lamented, "is that their also a copy of a letter from the plumber saying that he had looked at the dishwasher problem and had refered it to an appliance specialist. They're going to say that it was all somehow one related and that we should pay it instead of them."

"Yeah, I don't know", Sharon said reconsidering the situation.

"The only thing is", Phil went on, "is that they're friends with the plumber, so he could have written the letter at their request to help them get out of paying. The plumber's letter even say's how much he enjoyed playing on the same softball team as Chad this summer."

"Yeah, that sounds like they asked him for the letter to get out of paying", Sharon agreed.

"I'm not defending it and I'm not attacking it, I'm just listening to it", Phil told his neighbor. "Then you being screwed up by it", the man said. "Just like your kids", Phil thought to himself, he wondered if the children could confide in their father, their musical preferences, or was it a one way conversation topicent mag

"Do you think the Japanese are trying to defeat us economically, since they couldn't militarily", Jack asked.

" On the radio in the background the Talking Heads sang, "take me to the river, drop me in the water, push me in the river ... wash me... taking me down". Phil listened to it and thought about being washed clean.

"Your're just out for yourself", Vaughn said to Phil.

Phil didn't disagree, but he didn't think he was any worse in this respect than the average guy.

"Yeah, you're right", Phil responded, "I'm just like everyone else out there, most people just don't seem to know or admit that they're the same way. The human being is desperately selfish whether it knows it or not. Every thing we do is directly or indirectly ultimately a selfish act, even when we think we're at our most generous the old man had said about humans.

Organized religion is an elaborately designed ritual to get rid of our shame and guilt, so is everything else.

Phil told Vaughn about sending the fax out yesterday about delivering the report and advising the client to have his second-half payment ready at that time. From past experience, the client probably expected to have Phil show up personally.

Now as Phil and his friend talked, he prepared to send out another fax, that said, "Must advise you that report will be delivered to you tomorrow by overnight courier instead of by me personally...".

"You're the most situationally ethical guy I know", Said Vaughn after hearing of Phils latest ploy.

"Maybe the most sit ethical of your friends who know they're being that way", Phil said, "the others don't even know they're being that way, but they are and some of them are just as bad."

At the Republican convention Mrs. Quayle said that something like `not everyone protested in the sixties', implying that those who did were wrong. Well tell Mrs. Quayle that I was only 13 then, but I did and I darn sure aint apologizing for it. Later, regarding Hillary Clinton, she said that being criticized means your being taking seriously. Can you figure this one out.

"I don't want to compare you to Nero fiddling while Rome burned", said Sharon, "but that's exactly what you're doing to your family, by the way you're living your life."

Disregarding, her, Phil looked out the window at that strange window and thought about what if anything it meant and about the beard he was planning to start growing immediately. Heck, his business was already about down to nothing, how could growing a beard hurt it anymore.

"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine...sybiotic, embryonic... it's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine", ...REM.

"I'm not an expert", Phil said, "I'm just his father."

Sharon chuckled and bit her lip, subconsciously mimicking Phils underbite. She was a little surprised at Phils opposition to getting Joey a ridilin prescription for his so called attention deficit disorder. "I've got a little personal experience that tells me it's easier to start a prescription than stop one."

He wondered if the true drug lords were those in Columbia or those in the pharmaceutical companies, medical schools and drug stores.

When you play the Indiana lottery, Indiana wins", the lottery commercial said. "That's for sure, because the average Joe or Jane sure doesn't", thought Phil.

"We need to teach our boys and girls not to be criminals and how to try and protect themselves from criminals of all types. The girls might need a little more information on protection than the boys and the boys might need a little more education about keeping their noses clean."

In Phil's mind, Tanaka was the same character as the Tanaka in the James Cagney movie. He didn't think this one was diabolical like the movie version, but the scenario was similar.

Phil almost crack again and almost uttered something about this being just like in the movies, but he thought better of it and held his tongue. He didn't live on bread alone, but at the moment he wanted some and burning this bridge would not help him bring home bread.

He dictated an entry into his microcassette recorder diary after the meeting. "God have mercy on me", he said. "God, I know you know me better than I know myself, but this poor diary is my letter of explanation to you and anyone else that cares. Maybe it will be a literary excorsism of my soul, so I'll straighten out before it's too late. God have mercy on your children."

Sharon was mad that he had drawn a picture of the tree during work hours, not to mention how she felt about the picture itself.

"I'd rather be safe than sorry", Phil said.

"You're sorry enough as it is", Vaughn spat at him.

"Amen, brother", Phil meekly replied.

Everyone wants to rule the world, a good song by Tears for Fears was on as Phil scanned the radios airways and Phil tuned it in on the dial. This was a radio station that didn't want to be near Phil and instead of moving the antennae close to his body as he did with his usual station, he had to move the antennae as far away from him as possible for good reception. No wonder, it was a light rock station and his electrical field was generally not comfortable with the music they played.

"If you really want the notebook computer, you'll just have to work harder to earn enough money to buy it", Sharon said with her conventional salt of the earth wisdom.

"There you go again, telling me to work harder", Phil protested. "I'll just wait till the price comes down like printers have , instead of getting deeper into the rat race".

He was thinking of all the people he had seen as he walked along the road watching the drivers. Most of them looked harried, their faces scrunched up like racing car drivers. They were in most cases looking at the road or in the rearview mirror. About one in ten was looking at him.

I'm not really trying to reach what you call Nirvana, I'm just trying to get this machine to run on all eight cylinders. I'd rather do it naturally, but I'll settle for whatever it takes to reach the level of confidence

that most people seem to reach without any help. At least till they get old, poor, scared or in some other way devastated. Pink Floyd's "Run" was playing in the background.

"Do you or don't you think the Bible's the complete and absolute word of God", Vaughn wanted to know.

"I think that maybe it is and maybe it isn't", Phil replied, a little irritated at the inquisition.

"That's no answer!", Vaughn retorted angrily, "either you do or you don't, what is it!"

"It's none of your fucking business, and at the moment, that is my answer, because I don't know, I'm not convinced either way and at the moment I don't care to blindly believe either side."

Back at the house Phil and Sharon clashed after discussing how their votes for president were going to cancel each others out.

"Hey, I probably wouldn't have voted to give women the vote and...", Phil was saying when Sharon interrupted.

"Now that women voters outnumber and vote in higher numbers than men and vote for women or men that follow their dictates, I won't voluntarily follow their rules. I won't voluntarily be controlled by sisters, moms and grandmas anymore than by the good old boys, the Russians or anyone else that wants to rule me for their sake or mine."

"Well there's nothing you can do about it so you'd better move your ass over", Sharon said, "cause one way or another, you will do what the majority tells you."

"I'm tired of being just another of your excersise machines", Phil complained dishonestly. He went on trying to lay the basis for his case, "but I'll be happy to just be that or your gardner or whatever role you want me to play in the family, since you don't want me to live here anymore." In the background the old song There Is A Rose In Spanish Harlem played on the oldies station, "I'm gonna pick that rose and watch her as she grows, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la."

Phil's confusing argument didn't sway Sharon, she continued to vent her justifiable anger. She was on a different wavelength, and as EC said, "tigers crouched in jungles in her dark eyes".

There are somethings I shouldn't tell you for our own good, maybe in a few months or years we can talk about it more, but for now you're better off not knowing. If the boy figured it out, fine, if not even better.

Phil walked outside and mosed into his rickety garage. "I think I came out here for some fresh air", he said to himself. But he knew there was some other reason too, he just couldn't think of it at the moment. Was it to water the bushes or scope out which bush he would transplant next, or was it Clarence.

In the background Tommy James and the Shondells song Crystal Blue Persuasion was playing. Love is the answer it said as Phil and his friend walked and talked.

Love and marriage is the best way to raise kids", the old man told Phil, but you can't legislate it.

"Is PBR's liberal bent any worse than CBN's conservative one", Phil asked the old man.

"I don't know if I'm a Christian", Phil said to the evangelist, "if you ask me your test question, I'll probably fail, but if you ask me if I want to be a follower of Christ the answer's yes."

"You may or may not be able to extend your life through healthy living, but you definately can shorten it through your stupidity or candor", Clarence said.

"And as a "forignor" you can win friends and influence people only if you first prove your worthiness as a loyal and trustworthy friend. Those that are already accepted into society by accident of birth have this already because they are not subject to preconceived prejudices by the majority party."

Phil put his pointer finger on his crooked bottom tooth and slowly applied pressure to try to pull it into alignment. His ears popped and it seemed like he could breath and hear a little better. This was like getting braces, but cheaper and probably slower. He expected that if he did it enough, it would eventually straighten out the crooked tooth and in the process help align his jaw to help open his sinuses and estacheon tubes. Upon examining his teeth in the mirror, he noticed no improvement, but he was certain that he felt a small improvement each time he performed this excersise. Therefore he figured that it was doing some good, even if the visual correction was too small for him to detect each time. The trick was to hang on to that small improvement and build on it. This would be easier if he wasn't under constant attack of the accusers and defenders of the status quo. These aggressive cynics, saw anyone different as a threat and had the support of the establishment, which was as always quick to cry blasphemy at anyone who didn't observe their ritual superstitions.

"That was back in the days when people knew who their fathers were and you could still tell the difference between a robot and a person.

"I'm not convinced that the Bible is totally the inspired word of God, or that life is just bootcamp for heaven or that GOP is basically the same as GOD. Why should I support a

"Another pleasant valley Sunday, here in status symbol land", the Monkees.

He got off the phone with Jack after hearing the disappointing news. Jack still hadn't connected and he had nothing at all to smoke at the office except perhaps three or four hits of rendered and re-rendered resin and crud.

Phil was depressed and stopped at the fast food drive through for a breakfast biscuit, hash browns and a cinamon raisin biscuit.

Once he arrived at the office, it took only a few minutes to smoke the pitiful shit he had left in the film container.

Finishing up, he wondered should he call Andy. Andy was the only other person he could think of to call since Jack and Cal were both dry. He hated to, since Andy would probably already thought that old Phil only called when he needed to mooch a buzz.

He wished he hadn't thrown out the two pipes he had found in his rental apartment after the last renter, an apparent small time dealer had moved out. "Maybe I'll check the garage one more time and go through those tool boxes he left", Phil considered.

On impulse, Phil spun his chair slowly around and looked in his file drawer where he kept his stash. Maybe he had overlooked something in there and with a little luck he might find a couple of stems in the corner of the drawer or something.

He kept a number of files in the drawer, things like leases from the renters that he'd had over the past three years and he hoped that some tiny smokeable scrap had slipped under them. Moving the files to one side and then to the other of the drawer, he scrounged despairingly, not really very hopeful that his search would pay off.

"Thank you God!", Phil said to himself as he picked up the carefully twisted up coffee filter. His scrounging had paid off as he had found a tiny parcel of dried out bong scrappings that he had tucked away several weeks ago. He instantly wondered if he should be thanking God for this or if it would be better to keep God out of such things.

Now he was inspired and remembered that there was another coffee filter in the garbage. He had used it to filter the bong water yesterday, maybe he could scrap a few more grains of bong crud off it. He scrounged again and was moderately rewarded, but not like he had been by the filter in the drawer. It conceivably had enough in it for him to smoke all day and hopefully by then Jack would come through.

"Another trend related to the downloaders", Clarence told Phil, "was people cloning and raising themselves as children."

"Would they download their own memories into the children they created and raised?", Phil queried.

"Sometimes they would and sometimes they wouldn't", Clarence answered. "First they would clone themselves and then they'd raise themselves from infancy to adulthood. It's another way of trying to keep themselves immortal, since many of them foolishly aspire to that."

"Sounds pretty strange", Phil said, crinkling his eyebrows in a display of disbelief.

"Well, they think that they can do a better job than their parents did with them", the old man continued.

Speak of the devil the radio said.

"I'm for Clinton, because I don't think he could do any worse than Bush and even if he does I don't care, let's get it over with if that's what it's coming to", Phil said meaning armageddon.

"I wonder if you're really right about all this stuff you say God has told you. Are you really as sure as you say you are that you know all the answers, or are you just hoping you're right, so you can have "crowns" and be able to keep saying I told you so. I can't help but think what I think since such questions have already been in people's minds. You haven't convinced me otherwise yet, and until you practice some of the mercy you preach, you never will. All you've done is judge me and if you get the power to, you'll no doubt carry out my sentence.

"What gives you the right to say that this and that is God "moving" or God's will. It seems more to me that when things are going your way, you call it God moving and when things are going against you or for your adversary, you call it the devil. Seems like you pretty much call it the way you want it, your pious protestations notwithstanding.

"All people want to be in control of their own lives", Clarence said. "The way to do this, often is to be in control of someone else's life, like a spouse, employee or slave."

"This obviously creates problems, unless the other person is extremely passive, in which case it still creates a problem, in the form of resentment."

"Men have been the victors, on the basis of several attributes that they generally possess more so than women. But women have been battling it out with men for control since the garden of Eden."

"Men have fought back for all these millennia, with their wits and other weapons, women have done likewise. The result has been the macho society, where men have made use of their violent tendencies against women, for women and against other societies or elements in their society. The result is the "system", "establishment", "status-quo" or whatever else you want to call it. These allow a roughly symbiotic relationship between men and women and lower classes of people. A hierarchy, pecking order or whatever with the dominant man usually on the top, being henpecked to do more by the dominant woman. The means to carry this out is the classes they both dominate. The lower classes tolerate this barely or completely, depending on what negative or positive incentives are in it for them. Variations of this system include democracies, communism, religions, cults, tribal systems and the rest of human societies that are trying to control their destinies and reduce the effects of entropy or chaos."

"Don't look only at your own history books to learn about your own people. Look at your adversaries' books too and gain new, different perspectives on the glory of you and your ancestors. Not flattering accounts, but if we want those we can look in our own books. Western man has nearly obliterated every culture he has come in contact with. He says it is God's plan. An African pygmy was brought to the St. Louis World's Fair to be part of an exhibit on the evolution of man. He was along with eskimos, native americans like Geronimo and other "lesser" species displayed in native habitat. The thousands of the pygmy called the whites "Mizunga". Mizungas streamed past the pygmy's display and marvelled about the glory of the Mizunga race and the primitive ugliness of these lesser races."

The pygmy made it back to Africa and then as explained in a longer story, he came back to the U.S. He was once displayed in a cage with an orangutan in New York's Bronx Zoo, an apparent attempt by the zoo director to increase attendance. Later the pygmy committed suicide while leading a group on a nighttime hunting trip. This was something he liked to do, but this time was different. As was his usual manner, he stripped down to his loincloth and danced in the darkness. As usual there was no one listening, none of the Mizungas could understand what was going on in his soul. His dance meant one thing to him and mostly another thing to them."

His soul cried out for a ticket back to his forest home in Africa. He had seen the news and he knew this day that there was not much he could do against the magical dirty machines of the Mizunga."

There were no Mizungas listening and they held the key to his life in their cruel hands. His dreams could never come true in his life in his times, his day would not come in this life, where the Mizungas ruled. This day, he took a gun and as the story goes, put a bullet through his heart, they say that his soul went back to his old forest home that day."

They were reading the morning devotions and Phil was reading a part in the world of the man who had wrote the devotion book. Paraphrased, it said that before the fall of Adam and Eve, there were no thorns or thistles on any branches and that lions and tigers did not harm other animals to get meat."

"That's fine if you ignore the fossil record", he muttered as he read on. Sharon, Joey and Sally listened to the devotion. Phil wasn't going to say anymore about the bit on thistles and tigers, but as it would happen, the author had included two questions about that in the study section. Because the author was so insistent about teaching that evolution is bunk and that God suddenly made thorns grow and tigers bite. "I'm not saying that he couldn't do that", Phil said to Sharon, "but I don't believe that he necessarily did it that way."

Sharon shot him a look of dismay, she considered his talk borderline blasphemy. Heck a few hundred years ago you could be burned at the stake for talking like that. In her neck of the woods it hadn't changed, you could still get killed for talking this way.

Phil saw her expression and reacted. "Hey, that's how I feel and I've got no problem with it."

It was kind of like the discussion on who to vote for with some people the other day, including Vaughn, if you weren't going to vote for their candidate, you were crazy and they tried to put an incredible shame and guilt trip on you.

"If you've got a problem with it that's your problem", he went on.

Sharon was kind, she didn't say anything else about it, unlike Vaughn and the boys who wanted to make their problem, Phil's problems too.

"If you ignore the fossil record", said Joey mischievously. Phil didn't know what the boy thought about all this talk. He was probably the only one out of the three siblings, to know what mom and dad were talking about.

The evangelicals that claimed that they and virtually they alone were responsible for the founding of the U.S.A., were a thorn. Why was it then, that three of the first six presidents of the U.S.A. were Unitarians. Unitarians now were under attack as practically the ultimate secular humanist pigs, just as the Unitarians considered the evangelicals as the ultimate in self righteous pigs. In the background the singers sang make love not war, sounds so absurd to me, or else our world will truly rest in peace.

If these two sides didn't learn to live with each others opposing views, then all hell would someday break loose, as it had regularly throughout history. Neither side could be all right, and neither could point any true historical evidence to place him as his brothers master.

The actress was on NPR touting lithium as the cure that saved her life from the hell of manic depression. At the end of the segment, the producers expressed their thank first of all to the pharmaceutical company that had been one of their sponsors. Phil didn't know, but he wondered, was this a ten minute "information" commercial for lithium or was it an important educational program. Was the pharmaceutical industry using this non profit forum to get as many people as possible on their drugs or were they actually providing an important service to the "three quarters of manic depressive people", that are as yet undiagnosed and living at times in a hell on earth caused by the disease.

"I'll put up with you for as long as you put up with me", Phil said, "at least I think I will."

They both required some putting up with and Phil was fairly determined that he should put up with her shortcomings for the good of the kids number one and for their own good number two.

"I'm already gone...", the Eagles song said, but to Phil it had a completely different interpretation.

"To me it means I'm already gonna die prematurely anyway, from lung cancer, heart disease, murder or whatever, so I might as well live life to the fullest as long as I don't directly, or directly indirectly hurt anyone else. Applied to women he'd be a carouser if he went by his natural instincts. He believed that this would be hurting his wife and kids, so he restrained himself as much as he could.

"That's not very smart and it's a terrible example to teach the kids", Sharon said, her feelings hurt by Phil's explanation of already gone.

"I'm different", said Phil. "I'm half you know what and I have a different view of the world than you. I believe less in your ideals like conspicuous consumption and love it or leave it than you do, they didn't succeed in brainwashing me as much as they did with you, but of course you just call me satanic because I don't see things your way."

"You're crazy, that's what I call you and maybe the devil is in you, I don't know and probably wouldn't care except for the kids", was her reply.

"I care about conservation and all that other stuff as much as you, you just use it as an excuse to cover up all the lies and evil you perpetuate", she went on.

"That may be", Phil lamented, "but I hope you're wrong." He continued to file the spoon's edge smooth and then returned it to the drawer.

Sharon wanted to buy another one, "I won't use that spoon."

"You may not be able to make enough money to give these kids a decent standard of living, but I can."

"There's no doubt, the battle lines are being drawn, liberal versus conservative, both calling themselves the party of God, however they define it, I'm fighting for neither of them, but only in self defense. And I don't believe I've got much more than a snowball's chance in hell."

"Your Sunday school classes have the atmosphere of political rallies and your political caucuses rock with religious fervor and rhetoric, it's all the same, we're all playing the blame game."

"Well you make it sound like you're a victim, but you're the victimizer", Sharon rebutted.

"My generation is hopeless", Phil said. "The best hope is today's younger generation, not all of them have been captured by the establishment of the world. My generation has laid down in bed with the whore of Babylon. We have grown fat, lazy, complacent and have become the enemy. The idealism of the 60's has been abandoned for democratic or republicanism, we have embraced the old status quo because it has promised us our own little acre of paradise if we'll follow like sheep and not question authorities ranging from the morals of the church to the morals of the president.

"I'm doing a survey to see who's the most self-righteous of all the religions", Phil told Vaughn.

"One related thing I've noticed is that everyone's lining up according to party lines. Battle lines are being drawn for religion wars, to go along with the constant battle of the sexes and the race war, which both fester constantly. I'd like to say that I'm staying out of it, but it's hard not to try to find a group to identify and find strength in numbers. Unfortunately, I'm one of those people that doesn't fit into any group. I'm still in my very weak self defense mode, which means me against the world. I don't like the

current good old boy, patriarchal power structure because the oppress everyone. But I'm not willing to trade it for a matriarchal society or anything else, I'm holding out for nothingarchal society, in which a man or woman of any color can do what he want's unless he lays hands on another. Someone said give peace a chance, don't tread on me, Extreme, said it most recently.

When she found out about Phil's ciagrette butt collection and his standing on the corner panhandling with a homeless but not hopeless sign, Sharon made up her mind that he had gone completely mad.

For his part, Phil hadn't wanted her to know about that or the pain in his chest, but both secrets had been loosed.

At the end of the book, Phil learns that the old man is just that and not an angel.

He still believes that the government has no right to tell him what he can and can't put in his pipe, his glass or God's ground.

The republicans want to keep government out of big business, so that corporations can regulate themselves. At the same time they want government to regulate individuals personal lives. I thought the constitution and bill of rights protected the individual, but it looks like it protects the corporations.

Don't take your wife for granted and don't let her take you for granted.

"Maybe someday I will, but for now I'll take my chances with where I am, you can be my judge, jury and executioner if you want, after all that's what organized religion always has been. I'll take my chances with the God of the Bible myself, if he turns out to be exactly what you say then I'm probably in grave danger, but I'll pray for his mercy and his favor not for yours."

"There's no other way to intrepet the Bible, either Jesus was everything he said he was or none of it", Vaughn warned, "you've got to decide if you believe it or if you don't and if you're for him or against him and live accordingly."

"Well you know that I don't live accordingly, but I doubt you do either. I think I am as much for him as you are, but only God knows my heart, not you and not me. An as for deciding if I believe it all or not and what the Bible means, I can think of other explanations others than yours and you're not going to make your's the law if I can help it."

"You'll be sorry", Vaughn said, as he thought about the hit squad idea he had heard.0

A second later, a song with the line "it's so easy...like taking candy from a baby was playing on the radio and Phil's restless mind was thinking about how easy it would be pulling off his delivering the report late to the client trick. He would say that he had accidentally addressed the package to 20 Washington Street and not to the correct address of 220 Washington Street. Since Phil had already received the clients check and the report wasn't done, he would use this trick to gain a weeks time to work on the report and get it up to date. Then the song "Forever Young", which he had heard earlier in the day came to mind. He remembered the Biblical idea in it about "do unto others as you would have them do to you. Phil was ashamed of himself and felt guilty that he was lying to the client. He saw business somewhat like a war, which is also how the Americans perceived the Japanese as thinking. He wasn't sure if that were true of the Japanese or not, but it seemed to be true of him these last eight years. He wondered what the Japanese perception of American business ethics was and also their opinion of his ethics.

This is not a patriarchy, it is either a patriarchal matriarchy, or it's a matriarchal patriarchy. Evidence the way women have always manipulated men and witness the benefits and power that society offers to those women who marry highest and then take full advantage of it. No wonder, women are among the strongest backers of the status quo.

"You want a revolution! Don't you?", Vaughn accused Phil.

"Yeah a peaceful revolution, it such a thing is possible", Phil slobbered, looking up from his beer.

"That elderly neighbor lady, sure seems suspicious of me", Phil approached Sharon, "you haven't been feeding her information have you."

"All her subtle inuendos alluding to prohibition, revenue agents, new windows in garages and stuff, if I didn't know better, I'd think she suspects me of something."

"You guys want the right to privacy and non-invasion to be valid as long as their isn't some emergency reason to violate this and you want to be the ones to define the emergency. I'd like to know if there was a fight between those of your ilk and those opposed when the constitution and Bill of Rights were proposed", Phil continued his argument. Just keep hanging out at your stonehenges and pyramids and saying that you are speaking for God, he'll come for you as surely as he'll come for anyone else.

"It's either true or it's not", said Phil, "I don't know and I don't accept your choice as being "the" choice and law over me."

I hope that this world passes away into a better one, in which the rights of the individual are no longer trodden on by the rights of that thing known as "society". When society becomes a thing that because of it's own cumbersomeness and sixe votes to squash the rights of the individual to serve it's own self interest and not that of the individual then it's time for it to collapse under the weight of it's own rot. At that point it has forgotten that it was created to serve man, not the other way around. When the members of the power circles of society feel so threatened by the world that they have created, that they feel compelled to introduce laws that serve the interest of the strong and not the weak in society, then they have failed. When the laws of God and nature are inverted and the strong are ruled by the weak by the virtue of the weak having more voters, then there's something wrong. Such is the case when men in their desire to protect the weaker vessel in their society, hand the reigns of power to the women. Women who are morally no better or worse then men, will no doubt seize those reigns and make a better world for them and a worse one for men. Just as man wants to protect the weak, the weak want to be protected and if they are given the power to make the laws, they will pass a law over every little piece of our lives. Just like any other group that always thinks it knows what is right, women will "know in their hearts" that the laws controlling and restraining "threatening" men are right. They will therefore by the vote control men to the point that we are the slaves of the weaker sex and I do mean weaker in many ways. Although they are in may ways stronger, like apparently in lifespan, they seem to me ruled by hormones. That or something else, makes them unfit to rule over me anymore than any man is fit to rule over any man. This is just a long way to say that I don't want to be ruled over by woman anymore then I want to be ruled over by fickle men.

"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine", REM says. Some of you out there don't feel fine to find that the yoke you've had on us for the longest time is about to be lifted.

"No use calling, cause I know I'm falling and I'm getting pretty near the end ... it's the new mother nature taking over, ...", The Guess Who.

The deal for the mexican had not gone down and Phil was desperate. He had no money and his lungs were aching, he wondered if this was the end of the line. Did he have lung cancer, if so, then all this was a mistake, all he had been arguing for was wrong.

He also was broke, he wanted smoke badly, but he knew he couldn't afford any at the moment. He had one bowl of domestic left and planned on surviving for three or four days off of half a cigar he had found in Chicago last week. He would bong it, "if", that is "when" the cravings started getting to him to put some tar in his lungs.

Upon a little reflection, he was glad the shit was illegal. If he could go around smoking cigars of it, he would have been dead of cancer or heart disease years ago. Being illegal, it was too expensive and too risky to do that. The counter argument he could think of to that, was that there were thousands of men and women rotting in jail because it was illegal.

He was being selfish as usual, but really he still wished it were not illegal, so he could make the choice himself about ruining his life. It was pretty apparent at this point that he had done himself in by the choices he'd made. He wouldn't be seeing the kids growing up and the younger ones wouldn't even remember him. From his point of view that was one of the big downers of it all, that and the fact that he wouldn't be around to try and help raise them. On the other hand, he was grateful that he had at least been able to be around them for the years they did have together. Sharon was still pretty and no doubt could find a good new husband out there who would support and raise the kids at least as well as Phil would have.

"I'm an addict and a criminal", Phil wrote to the kids.

11/7/95

He wished that one way or another it wasn't that way, but in this world that's the way it is. He just wanted them to know that if they were smart they'd avoid the pit he had fallen into. Outside it was rainy and gloomy, the

"I'll definitely advise you to avoid those mistakes, but I'll also advise you to throw away the tight schedule that you keep. Don't let the world run you like a rat through a maze.

Phil cupped his left ear with both hands and it seemed he could hear better from it. Then he tried cupping a hand to each ear and noticed an even greater improvement and somewhat different type of improvement. It seemed logical to him, after all he was increasing the sound-gathering outer ear surface by about five times. "

"That's ridiculous", Jack told him.

Phil's definition of an office was a place to hang out and hopefully make a little money. A job was something you do to make Enough to pay the bills. He like being self employed, because the office was his and he wasn't someone elses employee.

Men and women should learn to accept some things. For example women should stop passing laws that try to force men to treat them in certain "equal" ways. The recent books by women on handling and defining menopause are an example of women grappling with a situation that is unique to them but that effects both them and men. Men look at young women as sex objects and older women as other things,

such as wise matriarchs. When women try to legislate that men do other wise, they are firing another salvo in the battle of the sexes. Both sexes would be better off if we worked a little more within God and natures apparent framework. Like RFK said, change what we can and have the wisdom to accept what we can't change. Maybe women can change men's perception's by punishing us for not having your view, but living our lives according to season of life we are in, might make more bearable the conflicts. This in no way means that men should not be compelled by their conscience to treat women equal and compelled by law not to abuse women.

By token of similar reasoning, blacks can destroy the world or they can be the ones to save it. The same applies to whites, Jews, Arabs, Japanese and everyone else.

"What do you do when the same country is both protecting you and oppresing you", Phil asked. "You try to improve it without destroying it", Clarence said.

"Everytime you criticize and attack me, you are judging me, which as you may guess, I don't appreciate. Take care of the man in you mirror and the mote in your eye before you decide to accuse me of this or that."

"The only time I've ever flipped out on you", Phil told Sharon, "was the day you were screaming at me and grabbed me by the throat while I was sitting in my recliner. I got up and slapped you one time. Other then that I've never flipped out on you or tried to hurt you or be mean."

"You hurt me and the kids every minute of the day because of the way you live", she retaliated.

She believed her anger at his was rightful, he believed it was not. As a good, conscience mother she would do anything at all to get what she felt was best for her kids. Anybody who got in her path had better look out, especially in this day and age when a woman is able to ruin her husband in stead of the old fashioned way, which was just the opposite.

Phil didn't think that Sharon necessarily knew what was best for everybody and he wasn't going to give up without a fight, destroy him though she might. He felt strongly that he might be right and her and her ways wrong. She felt even more strongly that she and her values were the right ones and this gave her the impetus to be so bluntfully willing to bully and dominate. She didn't see it as bullying, though and believed that she was un mistakeably doing God's will and darn Phil if he reisted here will, which was the will of her Protestant forefathers and foreothers. The same iron will that had virtually conquered the world.

And she wondered why he hadn't made a move on her in weeks, why was he so cold, why was he taking care of it himself, with Rosie as Jackson Browne put it. She assured him that she knew exactly what he was up to and how he was being selfish and unfair to her again. "What am I supposed to do?", she yelled at him, refering to her own need for sex. "What am I repulsive to you?"

The argugment ended abruptly upon Joey's loud and tearful pleas for mommy and daddy to stop fighting. He was going to tell her that it was hard to want sex from her for several weeks after an outbreak of one of her attacks on him. He don't know how she was wired, but his wiring made her not repulsive but definately unattractive to him for a long time after each time she raked him over the coals. It was a violation, though she didn't know it or maybe just didn't care. Her attempts to control those in her universe where undying and in his opinion perverse. But that was what made the world go around in her circle, men running the world on behalf of themselves and their matriarchs. As long as they and everyone else did what they Knew was right, everything was honky dory. If anyone was out of line, as

always someone was, they must smash it down in the interest of God, country and the family. As a libertarian, Phil was squarely in their sights and all tyrants sights.

The only way out thought Phil in his stubbornness was to call her bluff if it was one. He would have to demand that she hold absolutely no sway over him, which she could never accept without putting him through hell. It was the nature of both of them not to give in, so their battle of the sexes would not end in a truce anytime soon.

She had the advantage more than women had ever had it. They had superior numbers and they had most men on their side because their way was the best way for the status quo minded people who had already made their's and now wanted to preserve it for "posterity".

And it was all tied in to their religion and to the religion of any dominant group. To be rebellious against them was according to them to rebel against God and once they had made this judgement you were scum and must be destroyed. This had worked against every imaginable enemy over the millennium, since if you didn't think and worship to the powerful groups pleasure, they'd make you bend your knee the way they wanted you to. In Phil's case the local Protestant churches were what Sharon and her powerful attended and demanded that the kids attend, claimed they had the inside track with God.

"It shouldn't be any more illegal to smoke it, then it is to smoke or drink anything else.

He couldn't get a clear answer or agreement from different churches on what a Christian is and how many of their criteria you had to meet to be one, he didn't call himself one. Unitarians on the other hand made it pretty clear, you follow the dictates of your conscience. He was therefore either a Unitarian Christian or neither and he didn't particularly care what name they called him. After all they were only human judges and could only kill you and your's once.

Freedom Of Speech For Me But Not For Thee, was the title of a book mentioned on NPR, but Phil couldn't recall the author's name now that some time had passed since he heard it discussed. The radio show also mentioned a quote from a Holocaust survivor saying something like, the only solution for bad talking is more and better talking and ideas.

"I may or may not be the bastard that you always say I am, but I'll defend till the end my right to be whatever I am", Phil told Vaughn.

Men and women use each other equally for selfish reason, the purposes they use each other for are the main difference. So the guilt trips we put on each other aren't really so necessary and we can stop blaming each other for each other's problems after all.

"In life, everything we do has consequence", said the old man, "and unlike in physics, it's not always an equal and opposite reaction' type consequence". "In fact", Vaughn the "angel" as he called himself went on, "it's usually a lot more complicated than in the physical world."

"In the physical world, you get what you ask for, be it with smashing atoms or smashing funny bones. But in dealing with people's lives, the consequences are always complicated by monkey wrenches that we can't see or anticipate."

In the background a cash register dinged, "is that another angel getting it's wings?", Phil asked.

"You who would be judge, jury and executioner of those who you hate, fear or find foreign, you who say kill them all and let God sort them out, you who say throw them in jail, you who are the accusers, you who say "they" are going to hell... you are the same scared pagens that chanted to the priests incantations in the days of old and your churches and temples are the same as yesterdays pyramids and stonehenges and God knows what else. All a man can do is pray for God's help, stick to his guns and not to bend his knee to any earthly man or woman. You who would say burn the witch, will usually find that the only witch is the one in your black and broken heart.

"What it comes down to is you have to be constantly ready and willing to fight to the death to protect your God given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. If not there's always going to be someone ready to come and take your precious freedoms away in the name of one damned thing or another.

"It's sad, but I think I realize now that you won't treat me with respect, till I treat you with no respect, that seems to be the way you were raised or wired. The question then, is should I opt for respect or self respect.

Phil inhaled the cigarettes smoke through his nose and then also exhaled the smoke through his nose, after holding for only a second or two. He had recently read that the lungs were damaged more when smoke was held in the lungs for a longer time. He was trying to conserve however, so he took one last drag and then held it in for about ten seconds. He did this because he figured the smoke would saturate his lungs more and raise the level of it's active ingredient in his bloodstream, making his work for the day less of a drag. Phil did this in spite of what he had read in the article that quoted a real expert as saying holding it in didn't raise the level of active ingredient in the blood. Phil believed what the expert had stated, but he held it in anyway, following his own wrong logic despite knowing better.

The insurance company's forensic scientist examined the tar that they had extracted from the cadavers lungs and tested it. "It test's positive", he told Ralph.

"Great", the insurance executive said excitedly. "Now we have a scientific method of getting out of paying claims from pot smokers."

The scientist shook his head, "yes, there's no way they can deny that they lied on the application about using drugs, when they see this tes."

Ralph laughed, "yeah and since we'll have proved that they lied, we'll be released from the obligation of paying them a death claim. At the most we might have to return their premiums, but that's a lot less then the face amount of the policy they had."

"Not to mention the precedent this sets", the forensic scientist piped in. Both men were proud of their discover and at least one of them was thinking about how he could parlay the coup into a big promotion.

"I believe that he was at the very least the greatest human who ever lived and more likely he is the risen son of God, who is coming back to save his flock. I wish I could say I believe the second part all the time, but I have many days when doubt enters my mind. I've never seen any visions or miracles except ordinary every day, run of the mill ones, so I'm still a bit of a doubting Thomas, even though I often wish I weren't", Phil said.

"Well", the forensic scientist said, "I don't know why you believe any of that, after all their's no scientific proof of any of it."

"Yeah, it might be", Sharon answered, "but you're fooling yourself if you say you're doing for my benefit, you're really doing it for our own self interest."

"Just like saying you smoke because you enjoy it, you know as well as me that your addicted to the shit", Sharon broadened the discussion.

"Well I'll admit it", Phil replied in a low key manner.

"I admit I'm addicted to it and that so far I haven't been able to kick the habit."

Sharon eyed him suspiciously, "you have to want to first."

"I know", Phil said. "I know". Inside he knew that he wanted to quit on one hand and that on the other hand he didn't. Unless he ever decided that he really wanted to quit, he'd always be at the mercy of the vile chemicals t hat were rotting out his lungs, heart and probably his brain.

He'd have to get hooked on Jesus or something in order to throw it all away, but so far he had wanted the best of both worlds. He hadn't softened his heart and opened his mind like a lot of less egotistical people had and let Jesus in.

He thought he had tried, but he knew he hadn't tried hard enough. He still let all his intellectual arguments cloud the truth from his mind. It was interesting that in these days of the highest high tech ever, more people then ever were turning to God. It was largely because in these days of wars, pestilence and disease, the Bible rang truer in ever. It's prophecies were proof of authenticity and it's revelation of the future, definitely told the reader what side he'd better be on. Phil had managed to almost overlook all these important pieces of evidence, leaving him still confused and hooked on his several vices.

He was waiting for some miracle in his life that would put everything in perspective, but the rest of the good people out there were selfless enough to take it on faith. This was despite the fact that many of them had not even had the minor miraculous experiences that he had, had and which he had chalked up to coincidence or statistical probability. God could do nothing with him till Phil was humbled and stopped relying on own selfish brain.

On one level Phil was such an egomaniac that he wanted to have a role in the drama of the world, instead of just being a simple guy who tried to do the right thing. On another level though having a role scared the hell out of him and made him selfishly just want the riches of success without the dangers. A lot of things were scaring the hell out of Phil this day. He just kept going back to the thought that the Bible was not all true and he did not believe it. That solved dilemma of being told that he therefore had a responsibility to tell as many people as humanly possible about the Gospel of Jesus, which could endanger him and his.

What was he to do, keep his mouth shut and excuse himself, because he wanted to keep them all safe. This was a logical course because it afforded his family some safety, and since he wasn't even sure he was a Christian, why should he endanger them. On the other hand, he felt a compulsion to act and was rationalizing it by telling himself, he couldn't guarantee anyones safety anyway and they were all on there own. There best course might be to disown him, but that was there decision to make. He would have to live with the consequences of his actions regardless. All he could do was tell his brothers and sisters

everywhere that he believed differently than they did, but he accepted their God given right to believe whatever they wanted.

He prayed that they would honor his similar rights. They should all talk these questions of disagreement to death instead of shoot each other to death over these questions. At least they should respect each other's right to exist, to talk and to posture. Even saber rattling should be tolerated, but he should be willing to die for what Benjamin Franklin said he would defend to the death.

"Sharon", Phil said to his wife. "I know you think I'm basically a slob, an idiot, a weakling and who knows what else. Well I just want to say that your opinion of me is a reflection of what you think about yourself. If you had more respect for yourself, you would think that you're worthy of a good man and you'd see us both in a better light."

Every guy I know would like to be MVP, that's a driving force in just about everything we do. Is it any wonder that some people think in terms of the MVP of the world, which depending on your perspective would be Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna, or others.

"You place too many expectations on these kids", Phil told her. "You're going to drive them nuts."

"I don't think I have too many expectations", she defended. "I'm trying to balance it so that I place the right expectations on them that will help raise them to be happy, well adjusted and able to provide for themselves and their kids. I just want to protect their bodies and their minds. In case you didn't know, it's not such an easy job."

"I know", Phil said. "I know." He was thinking about his role in all this and that he was not doing the type of job he could and should do to help raise the kids rights.

"They didn't really teach this stuff in school did they?", Phil said.

"That's right, but God did put it in the Bible", she educated him.

"The same thing that makes you live can kill you in the end", said Neil Young in one of his songs. "I think I can forgive someone of just about anything as long as they haven't inflicted physical ill on anyone. Once they cross that line, it's hard to forgive them in any measure greater than their victims chances of recovery. Being a selfish human, I would probably forgive more or less depending on how personal their crime is", Phil finished up.

"I don't think that's very Christian", Vaughn and Sharon both said at once.

"We're all gonna be dead some day, maybe sooner than we'd like to be and maybe later", he said.

"The most disgusting thing about you is that all your so called friendships are based on that disgusting habit of yours", she said. "Just look at it, Jack, Ron, Bob and that disgusting Clarence guy. That's the only thing you guys have in common and you just use each other when it's convenient, so that you can get loaded up with it."

"Well it's not like you can just go to the corner store and buy it like a pack of cigarettes or a six pack of beer. Which I imagine you'd like to outlaw too. I don't know if my friendships are as shallow as you say, but I'm sure that the same thing has happened when cigarettes were recently unavailable in Italy or when booze was outlawed here during prohibition."

Phil went on, "besides you and your goody two shoes crowd operate on the same system of creating obligations and keeping score of them, you're just too darn `superior' to admit it."

make an outline and fill it in, just like a market research report

"Did God tell mother nature, you drive me wild, I'll drive you crazy, is God the male and mother nature the female sides of the universe?", Phil asked Lawrence after hearing the Kiss song on the radio.

"My goodness, you make mother nature sound like a whore and God like a lecherous old man", Lawrence said in dismay.

Suddenly Sally appeared at the top of the stairs, "these are my boobies!", she announced.

"Yes dear, I see", Phil replied a little surprised.

"I can show you my boobies", she went on and then she said something else that Phil couldn't understand.

"What hun?", he said, hoping to get a clearer message from the child.

"I can show them to you", the three and a half year old said, "because I can't reach up real high yet!" She stood at the top of the stairs and stretched real far to show just how far she could reach. In her mind, the fact that she couldn't reach up real high yet, was strongly connected with the fact that showing off her boobies was not taboo yet either.

Then she went on to another topic, "Rebecca and I saw a spider in my room and it tried to get us!"

"Oh my!", said Phil in exaggerated excitement. "What happened to it?"

"Mommy killed it!", the child related happily. "Mommy killed it with one of these things", Sally held up a magazine. "That's nice...", Phil's words were stopped by the little girl's next move.

"Ahhhh!", she screamed in terror as she slipped and started plummeting down the stairs. "Oh-no!", Phil yelled, jumping to his feet and flying towards the spiraling little one intersecting her at the bottom.

"Whaaaaay!", Sally screamed. She was more shaken then hurt.

"You wanted a lap dog, but you got a junkyard dog", Phil said proudly.

"No I wanted a decent husband, but I got a lazy bum", she replied matter of factly, adjusting the apron around her waste.

"Call me a lazy bum if you want to, I'm not claiming to be a saint. I'm just doing my best to be happy, well adjusted and provide for myself and my family. Like you said, it's not such an easy job."

Sharon looked at him and smiled the sweetest smile ever, "yeah, you old blok, none of us are perfect, I guess you are doing the best you can." They embraced and kissed with a new, never before matched passion and intensity.

Sharon was both intelligent and wise, but she still wasn't going to run PHil's life.

He trusted the Pastor's knowledge of the world and hereafter more than the rock and roller's or anyone else's, because the pastor's knew the most about the Bible, which he believed held all the answers. They didn't always apply what they knew about the Bible, but they certainly knew it better than anyone else. He would primarily rely on them for information about whether this or that was new age, was God inside us or outside us or whatever, they would know best.

"The thing about Phil and Sharon is that they'll never really get along until Sharon's about 80. She's so serious that it'll take her that long to mellow out. Phil's been mellow all his life, so until she chills, they'll never get along as well as they should", Jack told Melisa.

Phil appeared at the door of the trading company and asked to see the Japanese person-in-charge. In one hand, Phil held his business card and in the other hand a fifth of rare scotch whiskey, his ticket of admission .

"We're sorry, all of our operators are busy right now", the recorded message said. "No you're busy, right now because all of your operators are sorry", Sharon replied to the robot voice.

As Phil leaned over to remove the screw from the bottom office shelf he was removing, a large wholesale club coffee can full of pliers, screwdrivers and screws slid off it's perch. Down below, Phil had been watching it as he knew his head was exposed to just such an assault.

"Look out Dad", Joey yelled just in time.

Phil's head and hand were already moving to dodge and intercept the can even before it gained terminal head knocking velocity. He caught it between the edge of the shelf and the thin air over his thin haired head. With a move that looked fairly deft to the boy, Phil caught it and replaced it on the high shelf all in one motion, without losing a single screw.

"Gosh Dad", Joey said a little surprised at his father's quickness. "How did you catch that so fast."

"It was easy", Phil said paternally. "I saw it coming. It's not all the one's you see coming that get you, it's the one that you don't see."

As he spoke he backed out of the right side of the closet and stepped over to the left side. Then with a big effort he slid both of the sliding closet doors to the right. At that moment, the three six foot long shelves that he had early leaned against the sliding doors from inside the closet fell. It was one of those times when there wasn't enough time to react. Boom! They caught Phil solidly on his head knocking him almost to the floor.

Joey gasped and then laughed when he realized his dad was okay. "Famous last words", the boy said.

"Darn you", Phil said angrily before realizing the benign nature of his sons laughter. "I guess I should be wearing a hard hat."

Later that day driving home, Phil was again stopped by officer Olin. He quickly hid the metal cigarette and poured the smoke out of the film canister onto the floor of the car. It was such a small amount that he figured it would be imperceptible to anyone but a dog.

"Can I see your drivers license and auto registration", the sheriffs deputy said with authority.

"Sure", replied Phil cheerfully, it's right here. He opened the glove box and searched for the registration form.

"I thought I smelled something funny", Olin said.

"Well, I was smoking a cigarette", Phil cooperated voluntarily.

"It didn't smell like a cigarette", Olin retorted, knowing full well that he had smelled the other kind of smoke.

"Well I'm sorry, sir, but that's what I was smoking", Phil was insistent but polite.

"Then show it to me, where's what's left of it", the deputy said with growing irritation.

"Ah, I think I dropped it out the window a minute ago", Phil said getting a little more defensive.

The lawman looked around on the ground, "I don't see it", he said. "If you can find it fine, if not, I would like to take a quick look inside your car. Just to satisfy my curiosity."

Phil tried to think of an excuse, "well I'll look, but it was the non filter type, there's probably nothing left, I smoke them down pretty far."

After a minute, Phil gave up, "I don't see it", he said. Phil hoped that his spirit of cooperation would be noted and he excused with a stern warning or the like. He was hoping that the officer would decide not to ask again to search the car, but it was not to be.

"I would like to look inside your car, is that okay with you?", he quizzed Phil.

Phil didn't know which choice to make, make a stink about his rights or cooperate further, figuring that the cop would not find anything. He had been rehearsing a speech in which he said he would not allow a search on the grounds of his principals and the constitution. "I don't want to set a precedent", he thought. "If I let you search my car without a warrant I'm contributing to the breakdown of my own constitutional rights, so I must insist that you get a warrant."

But Phil thought better and decided to grant deputy Olin the right to take a look in his car.

Why are the Japanese the way they are, why are they so hard driving. Are they as devious as our stereotypes tell us they are", Phil asked the old man.

"Why don't you ask Tanaka", Larence answered. (Larence claims to be Phil's guardian angel, but he's never done anything supernatural, so Phil takes him with a grain of salt.

"He would just ask me if American's are as wicked as they seem to the Japanese", he answered, Phil wanted an unbiased opinion and if Larence really was an angel he should be that.

"Maybe you should be asking a different question", Larence said. "Don't even bother asking if it's so, just ask yourself and Tanaka if it's nature or if it's nurture that causes it."

"I'm not saying that I'm right about everything, I'm just saying I'm not depending on Jesus and praying that he'll save me. I'm not saying you have to do it too, but I think you should, because he can save you in the long run. I'm not putting my chips in with him and the ZOG. None of our physical bodies survive the world, but maybe our souls can, but I don't know that all we have to do is ask and believe in Jesus. Now please let's not talk about if my faith or my walk is perfect, because they're not. They're probably not even average yet, but I think they're going to get better, God willing."

Tanaka looked at Phil and spoke, "the bubble has burst, our client's do not have the money now to consider researching the U.S. market."

Phil had heard that Japan's bubble economy had "burst" about a hundred times in the last year. At the same time his income had shrunk to less than half of what it had been a couple of years ago. He was starting to think that the bottles of whiskey that he'd given as presents were a waste of money. Now on top of everything else, his Japanese clients were getting slower and slower about paying for his services.

"What do you think about the shellacking we gave old Saddam last night?", Jack asked.

"If it's God's will, like you guys imply then fine, if it isn't then darn you", Phil told his friend.

"Hey we just don't want guys like Saddam and the Japs trying to take over the world", Jake defended himself.

"Yeah, you guys have been running it for hundreds of years and you don't want to give it up do you?", Phil assailed Jake.

"What the hell do you mean you guys?", Jack wondered back. "You're as white as I am."

"Yeah, but I don't think we're the same. I not one of and I don't want to take orders from the good old boys, the old boys, the boys or the ladies, so don't call you and me the same."

"Well you may not be the same, but you're sure no better than me!", Jake said, going on the offensive.

"That's right", said Phil. "No better than you or anyone else, that's right."

"I'm tired of people holding me to a higher standard than they hold themselves. It's the old line don't ask me any questions and I'll tell you no lies", Phil was pissed. "You come over under the guise of helping me move and instead you smoke my stuff and take my furniture for free. I was hoping it would only cost me one or the other to get moved, but I guess you're charging me twice."

Jack was ready for Phil's barrage, "yeah, but according to your obligation theory, think of all the obligation credit you just accrued off of me."

They both laughed, one way or another it would all come out even in the end if they gave it enough time.

"We have all mastered the art of fooling ourselves, it's harder to fool others", the old guy told Phil.

Phil thought to himself, "hmmm? ... hun? no wonder they're called hun".

He had been listening to things seemingly being thrown around and banged around upstairs ten minutes ago, when Sharon seemed to be in a rage against him. But no when she came down the basement to tell

Phil she was leaving, she was as cool as a cat. There was no sign that she had had any kind of temper tantrum and Phil started to wonder if it just sounded loud upstairs when one walked around and did housework. That could have been it, maybe his oversensitive mind had just imagined that Sharon was having a tantrum. Either he had imagined the whole thing, or she was acting very strange.

"JUST STAY OUT OF IT", Lawrence said emphatically to Phil.

"The way God runs the world is none of your business, so you'd be smart to keep your mouth shut and just butt out!", Phil was shocked, he'd never seen the purported angel in such a tizzy before.

"Just be satisfied to be an observer in this whole affair and be content to play your own insignificant part, don't forget you're a married man and have responsibilities, it's not like you're a single guy with only yourself to worry about. Write it all down, if you want to, since you think it's therapeutic, but don't do anything else with it, it may not be worth it", Lawrence finished his advice.

Phil had already pretty much decided the same thing, he felt it would be better for everyone involved if he kept his mouth shut. After all, he wasn't sure of any of his ideas, and the groups at each extreme pole had unflinching faith in their own indisputable proof. He had toyed with the idea of watering down anything controversial, but it needed to be all or nothing. Taking the therapeutic diary approach, he could write down his unbridled thoughts and have a better chance of keeping them all out of hot water.

"The only way your heart will ever be white is if plaque and cholesterol turn it that way", said Sharon.

"Ugh!", thought Phil, "Attila the Hun is back".

"Think I'll take a couple of tylenol for this braintumor", he said as he left the room.

Phil eventually became convinced that Sharon was trying to slowly kill him by feeding him nothing but high cholesterol fatty food. He knew that she was from a family background where such foods were the norm, but he still was extremely suspicious of her and her possible motives.

"Here dear", Sharon said as she put the plate of greasy burgers, fries, macaroni and cheese and green beans on the table in front of him and the kids.

"She's probably thrown in the green beans to disguise what she's doing", Phil thought to himself. He figured that she'd start feeding the kids healthy food after she'd done him in. "Why the hell doesn't she just use arsenic or cyanide and just get it over with quick."

"It is obvious that some members of each race have declared war on each other. It is prudent for the other members of each to work for peace, but not let down their defenses. What has happened in Bosnia and elsewhere shows that there is nothing as vicious and barbaric as ethnic or racial hatred unleashed. Bosnia is also another illustration of the fact that the UN or U.S. or whoever will not be there to save anyone except those who it is in their immediate interest to save. As for my people, we are blamed for most of the evils of the world and those who call us enemy will doubtless grant us no quarter when the shit hits the fan. Whether the threat comes from a different race, religion, nationality, from within or from a combination or whatever", Phil continued.

"Face it", Jack said. "You mean blacks don't you."

"I admit that I personally am very afraid of blacks, but I may be wrong", Phil explained. "We're as likely to be done in by right or left wingers who are white, or Russian's or someone else, but I admit, I'm scared of blacks and always have been."

"That's really stupid Phil", Jack replied, "they're are best allies."

"Maybe they are, at least we should be allies and many of them are the nicest, kindest most loyal people imaginable, but some of them are at war with me just because I'm white and they're stronger then me. If more people were like Mohammed Ali or Martin Luther King, then I'd be less apprehensive. Ali was arguably the toughest man in the world and he was also sensitive and intelligent enough not to be railroaded into going to a war he didn't believe in."

Jack laughed, "kind of like the old line about `what if they gave a war and nobody came'."

"Yeah, maybe he was sure enough of his manhood that he didn't need to shoot other people to prove he was tough", Phil said.

"Well he also didn't need a job, like a lot of soldiers do when they sign up", Jack protested.

"Heck, do you think he would have gone even if he did need a job?", Phil said with a sneer.

"One thing I've never done is get a pretzel to break just the way I want,by nibbling on it so it will look like an e. Whoa, I did it", Phil said amazed at the timing of his success and at the misplaced bite that did the trick.

Phil stashed all his stuff into the usual places and got out of the car hurriedly, he wanted to get into the house as soon as possible in order to arouse less ire from Sharon.

He hopped up the steps from the garage into the house and took a leftturn into the laundryroom. Kneeling down Phil opened the Boston Terriers cage and released his pet.

"Mr. Snoopy", Phil chastised playfully. "Mr. Snoopy, who's been locked up in this little cage for the last hour and a half."

The little dog wagged his almost non-existent stump of a tail and smiled wide, showing his small bulldog like jaws and teeth.

"Mr. Snoopy, who would have been running around the house tearing things up if I hadn't locked him up!", Phil finished his pretend scolding of the dog.

Snoopy was only one and a half and still in that playfull puppy stage.

The dog had been knocking over garbage cans and chewing up everyone's socks. Just today Phil had found one of his own gloves which he had laid on the register to dry, moved to the area around the back French doors. Fortunately Snoopy had not chewed it up.

"Help yourself if you need a drink", Phil kidded the little dog. "You know where the toilets are." Phil didn't know if the toilets were the dog's first choice or last, but he knew that the dog sometimes drank out of it when his own water bowl was full.

"I think you'd be crazy to change what you're doing and I think I'd be crazy to change what I'm doing", Phil told his father regarding consulting and life in general. "But then, maybe I'm crazy too."

"Yeah, you get blasted for whatever you're doing", Dad said.

"I know what you mean", Phil replied in agreement. "No matter what you do you don't satisfy a darn soul out there, so you might as well not wonder what any of them think."

"Yeah, I'd be a bad boy to keep that computer", Phil told his father. "I'll be hurting IBM and the way things are going, it could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. After all there's nothing wrong with the computer, they've just given me too good of a guarantee."

"I must be a bad boy, or else I just have an overactive imagination, because I'm always schemeing", Phil said.

"I would say that it depends on if you just imagine these schemes, or if you perpetrate them on society", his father counceled.

"Ah, yeah Dad", Phil said uncomfortably. "I'll have to work on that one."

He knew the honest thing to do would be to keep the computer, but on the other hand he was thinking of adding insult to injury by keeping the leather carrying case and the software IBM had included for his new smaller notebook computer. After all the new smaller one he was buying off the TV shopping network didn't come with these valuable extras.

He had just sold an expensive report to an IBM spinoff two months ago, on Christmas eve in fact. "What goes around comes around", Phil thought very unoriginally. He was thinking in terms of some good luck that might come from acting honestly in this case.

"Dad, the new one's an IBM too, don't you think that makes it okay, since I'm just trading it for another of their products?", Phil tried to legitimize what he had already decided to do.

"You decide that for yourself." Was the reply.

"Heck", continued Phil. "For the price of the one I'm sending back and getting a full refund on, I'll be able to get a more compact notebook computer and a portable IBM printer. See. I'm getting two IBM products instead of just one?! Won't that help the company twice as much as owning one of their machines? If that doesn't prove it's the fair and right thing to do, I don't know what does."

Dad just sat there and scratched his head, disappointedly in bewilderment. Was it his fault he wondered, how this boy had turned out. Had he done things so wrong? Was that why his son had turned bad.

The strongest force holding him back from doing it was Sharon, he'd have to subtly persuade her that it was right too, otherwise he'd have a guilty conscience. He had to trick her into saying that he should send it back, that would get the devil off his back and his easily appeased conscience would leave him alone.

"On the other hand", he thought, "there's no reason to even tell her that I know now the battery and re-charging systems are just fine."

As long as Sharon didn't know he had discovered that he was wrong about the notebook computer being defective, he wouldn't have to do anything about her. His conscience would understand, after all it was pretty weak lately.

"What are you going to do?", Dad asked.

Phil grinned sheepishly, "I'm going to try not to return it, but I won't be sure what my decision is till they contact me and tell me my refund authorization number is about to expire."

"They may never call you", Dad finished the conversation.

"Buy American or Bye America", Phil didn't know exactly why he was posting those bumper stickers on every telephone pole in town.

It's either to ease or appease my conscience, he thought. "It's a public service announcement", he told Jack. "And it's an advertisement for my insurance business too." He had his insurance agency's phone number on the bottom of the bumper sticker.

"Well it's hypocritical as all get out", Jack replied with irritation. "Why don't you just stop doing market research for the Japanese if you feel that way?"

"I guess I'm too lazy", Phil answered non-chalantly, but inside he was upset. "Not to mention that it pays the bills."

"Hey!", Phil continued. "I'm not saying people should have to buy American, I'm not saying you're unpatriotic if you don't buy American..."

"That's what it is...", Jack interjected.

"Well, maybe", Phil replied. "But I'm just saying what I believe is a cause and effect relationship, I'm not saying I care if it happens. I'm not sure I think America's worth saving."

"Oh man!", Jack said jumping up. "You're so full of crap. If it wasn't for the freedom the U.S.A.'s given you, you wouldn't even be able to make a living doing the shit you do."

Phil was at a loss, he hadn't really figured out how he felt about all this, he was basically doing the bumper sticker to quell some uncomprehensible guilt feelings inside.

"Don't let the bad blood of the ages re-emerge and let us turn mad towards each other. That is something that has gotten man into trouble too many times in the past and the present. We can't go crying to God for mercy after we've messed things up beyond repair", Phil said.

"Yes you can!", Vaughn exclaimed. "That's one of the nice things about God, he always seems ready to consider forgiving sinners and giving them another chance."

"As Steven Tyler said, 'the judges constipation has gone to his head, his wife's aggravation...you're better off dead, it's the same old song and dance.'"

"I'll do all I can to help people of color, except sell the farm", Phil said.

"What the heck do you mean?", said Tyrone. "It sounds to me like you don't want to give any money to help poor people."

"No, I just don't want to give what I consider giving away the farm amounts of money."

"Well you'll pay the price later then", said Ty.

"You have to draw the line somewhere", Phil exclaimed, "otherwise we're just passing on our problems to our grandkids and kids."

"You have to think about others too. If you don't give poor kids a little help, they'll fall by the wayside by the millions and they'll take you, your kids and your grandkids down with them", Ty exclaimed back.

"You might be right", Phil shook his head as he spoke and lit another cigarette. "I don't know what to do."

"I don't expect the government to solve these problems or to protect me from violence and I'm sure as heck not strong enough to protect anyone."

"No one's immune from violence, when societies are class divided", Tyrone remarked.

"No one's immune from violence even if they aren't", Phil shot back.

Tyrone shot Phil a look and finished the discussion, with that meaningful expression.

"I'll tell you one thing", Phil continued. "I'll take the founding fathers over the present "fathers" anyway. I like Jefferson and Washington a heck of a lot better than Clinton and Bush."

"It's all the same to me", Tyrone said visionarily. "For my people it's usually not mattered who the great white buffalo in Washington DC is."

"Sound's like you should be joining the kkk", Tyrone said.

"Heck I'd be tempted", thought Phil. "Shit, they wouldn't take me anymore than they'd take you. I'm a halfbreed, they ethnically cleanse the hell out me."

"That's right the Hell out of you", Vaughn said bursting open the door and overhearing the conversation."

"I'm against abortion and I'm for womens choice, so where does that leave me?", Phil asked Vaughn. "Since you know everything, where does that leave me?."

"Sitting squarely on the fence as usual", Vaughn answered. "Well I'd rather see people on a sitting on a fence then sitting on a tank."

He continued in his attempt to prepare lunch, but he was having trouble deciding whether to make a sandwich and soup or zap something frozen like a burrito. The microwave meal idea was probably less healthy but Phil cared only that it was easier. "I need a no brainer today," he said to himself. Ty and Vaughn looked at each other wondering what there strange friend was talking about.

"Amen to God or whatever you want to call the positive power in the universe, even if you call it mathematical probability.", Phil ended.

"It makes it so that sometimes you can't sit still and you need to move. You can't stay seated, you'd squirm, instead you just got to get up and boogie or play a sport or walk or something. This is all related to the reason that the man don't like the stuff. He don't want you to see that his way isn't the only way and he's not into the boogy woogy at work."

"Do you use the stuff", Vaughn demanded.

"Don't be ridiculous!", Phil replied trying to deflect the question.

"Well!", Vaughn asked again. "Do you?"

Phil had thought about his answer to these questions many times, "your question is ridiculous, if I answer, you'll just ask me more so I'm telling you `nada'".

"You're obviously hiding something", Vaughn said scrutinizing his acquaintance. He saw Phil as a threat to his cult and wanted something he could pin on him when the time came.

"If you don't like it lump it", Phil replied while getting up to leave the room. He didn't appreciate being interrogated every time he had to meet with the man.

"I'm against abortion, but I don't think I'd ever fight to stop it", Phil reflected as he entered the office of the pastor.

The old man looked up from his papers. "Well then I think you're wrong", he said.

"I can believe whatever I want, be a coniseur of anything I want and do whatever I want as long as I don't hurt anyone else and this church should leave me alone", Phil plopped down in a chair and sighed a big sigh.

"You're wrong about that too, Phil", the old man went on, "because you don't seem to know when you're hurting others sometimes."

"Well I'm gonna follow the dictates of my own conscience not your's", the younger man protested.

"I'm not talking about my conscience", the Pastor went on. "I'm talking about the word of God."

"That's easy for you to say, Pastor, but every other guy out there seems to know what God want's and if a guy listens to all of them, he'd never be able to do anything", Phil defended his position.

"I'm not talking about what people say about God, I'm talking about what's written down in his Bible. It's all right down on paper, clear as can be", the old Pastor argued.

"Yeah, it's written down on paper, but it's not clear, everyone tells me it means something different", Phil continued debating.

"Well all the major churches agree on a few things, so those are the things you must adhere to", the old man concluded and went back to reading his Bible.

"I don't know what to think", Phil said, rising out of the comfortable over stuffed chair. He knew that the old man had concluded his remarks and it was time for him to go though, that had been made clear by his going back fastidiously to his scriptures.

"Melisa flips out when I tell her half the truth", Jack said. "There's no way I'm gonna tell her the whole truth about how I feel about things."

"So this is what you do!", Sharon scolded sarcastically. "You go for one of your so called rides in the country for half an hour, then come down here and kick this punching bag and exercise for another half an hour. You sure are working hard!"

"That's the whole idea", Phil tried to deflect her attack. "The whole idea is to do what you want with your life, not be a prisoner to the rat race."

"Well it's no wonder the bills aren't getting paid", Sharon threw the plate at him and attacked. Her fingernails dug into his throat as he squirmed, pinned in his recliner. After a couple of seconds, she let go and he rose. Smack he slapped her good and hard across the face.

"Don't you ever do that to me again!", his girlfriend yelled.

Maybe we are the dust mites of the Universe, blown here by the breath of God. Maybe in this infinite universe, we're as widespread as dust", Phil imagined.

"I hardly think so", said Jack. "I think you're letting your imagination get carried away."

"I expect the same fifth amendment rights to be respected by you as I'd get from the government", Phil told her.

"I also have declared Independence from the government", Phil went on. "But I haven't declared it from you and I'd like to keep it that way"

"As far as the government is concerned, I'd like them to treat me as an independent state. I will treat them the same."

"Wow, you've really lost it now", Sharon said, her eyes opening wider.

"I just want to exercise my God given right to the pursuit of happiness. I won't hurt society and I expect for it not to hurt me."

"You are crazy and you already are hurting society", Sharon retorted. "Look at your life, it stinks, everything you do is detrimental to society."

"Well that's your opinion", Phil said defensively. "I know you're at least partly right and I'm trying to change things. With a little help from above maybe I will."

"You're possessed!", Sharon said, not knowing for sure whether she believed her diagnosis of him or not. "You think you're the Messiah or something, don't you?"

"If I ever did, I was suffering from delusions and I would be ashamed to even admit to doing that, because it's probably blasphemous. I just hope and pray that I'm doing something on the plus side, not the negative. I don't have any direct line to anyone, so all I've got to go on is my own conscience and gut feelings. I'm not going to voluntarily forfeit those and go by someone else's."

"There are a lot of things you can do while you're talking and there are a few things you can't. I'd rather do than talk and you'd rather talk than do, so don't you think it's a drag to be around you?", he told the man.

"There are lots of things worth doing, but not that many worth talking about. Especially when all that talking keeps you from doing the worthwhile things.

"No one has the right to run me into the ground, work me like a dog and wear me out", Phil said.

"You're doing it to yourself worse than anyone else is", Sharon defended herself.

"Yeah, but I'm doing it to me, not to you", Phil replied.

There are times when you just have to stop what you're doing, whatever it is and listen to the music on the radio. "Hey you!", by Bachman Turner was one of the many songs that had this effect on Phil. He stopped typing on the computer and swiveling his chair put his feet up on his desk. Phil pulled the radio down using the rope and pulley system he had put together and turned the volume up until the pounding rhythm beat against his head at 100 decibels. The words and music were being driven into his head and the drums beat against his body ecstatically. The song ended and Phil turned the volume back down to about halfway on the old boombox's scale.

"Just as I want the right to privacy from my government, I also want it from my family, friends and everyone else. I'll leave your private life alone if you're not hurting someone and I'd appreciate the same from you. When you or government or anyone else

Phil was pulled over because the police officer told him he wanted to give him a citation for driving safely. It was very ironic this time Phil was caught in the act. It was also a little suspicious when Phil saw in the rearview mirror that Vaughn was pulling up on the shoulder behind his own car.

"What are you going to do now", Vaughn sneered at Phil. "Take on the whole U.S. Government with your hands tied behind his back?"

Phil didn't answer except to himself, "yes, behind my back and barehanded, unfortunately." He knew he was taking on the whole U.S. government and the whole world's government whether he liked it or not.

On the radio as he was hauled away from his car was the song "If you don't like the way I'm living, you just leave this long haired country boy alone", by CDB.

"Change that to God is great, Religion can be bunk", Phil said as he walked back into the Pastor's office. Sitting down he began a conversation, this time trying to be less judgemental and more conciliatory.

"Mind your own business and I'll mind mine", Phil told the neighbor.

"You seem to know so well what's best for me, that you've forgotten that we should worry about the mote in our own eye, not the one that may be in our neighbors."

"My best friends pet peeve is number two on my list and other peoples are after that. My own pet peeve is number one with me, just as my friends is number one with him", Phil said.

"Oh that's real profound", Vaughn said sarcastically.

"I'll be your friend, but I'm telling you right now my goal is to convert you so we'll see more eye to eye", Phil told the devil worshipper.

"Well I won't!", Vaughn spat out. "Maybe I could if you were some other type of heathen, but you worship the devil, so unless you repent I won't eve be your friend."

Vaughns words made Phil wonder if he had been out of line with that comment as he looked at the young man's black clothing and spider and snakes jewelry. After all, he was just about ready to apply to join the local church.

"I just found a million dollars someone forgot...inside out and upside down", Guns and Roses.

Joey meanwhile was explaining to Sharon about the business project he was doing in his third grade class. She listened attentively as usual, while Phil who was also stuffing envelopes, heard it only out of the corner of his ear.

Phil heard Joey say the number 666 and his ears perked up. Alarmedly, Sharon reacted, speaking to the boy in a fast pitched voice.

"666, that's not a good number to choose", she told him urgently. "That's the number that the Bible says it very, very bad."

Joey was not sure of the meaning of all this, but it did jog his memory about something that he knew was bad. "I picked 555 for the first prize", he said defending himself. "666 was only for the grand prize."

Phil listened with interest and wondered what the boy meant by that, but figured it was very innocent on his part. It was also interesting to see Sharon's carefully measured response.

"I'm not saying you're bad or that you did anything wrong", she told her son. "I'm just saying you should choose a different number than 666."

"I will", Joey said hastily. He didn't want to blaspheme even though he didn't even know what the word blaspheme meant. He did know that when mom spoke in that tone of voice it was important and he knew that the Bible was more important then mom or apple pie.

Joey came back down the stairs to Phil's office, he looked only a tiny bit shaken, but he had learned a lesson.

Phil couldn't resist a little joke, "whatever possessed you to pick that number." Joey didn't seem to get the joke even though Phil had accented the word possessed.

"I didn't mean anything Dad", Joey said.

Phil was a little embarrassed that he was joking about that number, especially since the boy did not get it.

"Dad, I can't lick anymore envelopes right now, Mom want's me to clean my room. Thanks for the fifty cents", Joey said.

"Thank you", Phil replied looking at the pile of fifty-some-odd envelopes that his son had licked and or taped shut.

"Yeah and Mom's not paying me for cleaning my room", through his sticky tongue.

"That's volunteer work, huh?", Phil said with a chuckle.

"I know", the boy laughed back as he left the little office cubical.

"Only use your powers for self defense and other good", Phil told Joey as he finished punishing the punching bag with punches and kicks.

Vaughn came in unexpectedly, having been let in by Sharon while the boys were in the basement.

"So who are practicing beating up", he sneered.

"I'm practicing defense, not beating up", Phil answered out of the side of his mouth, never looking at his neighbor.

"It doesn't look like self defense to me", Vaughn said back with one of his rare smiles. "And who do you need to defend yourself from anyway."

"People like you and other tougher people that you would like to throw me in with", Phil said letting go of a big side kick to the heavy bag.

"Well it will never work", Vaughn sneered thinking that a little torture would do Phil a lot of good.

"I'll just harden my shell, I can't help it", Vanessa said when she heard about Phil's addiction.

"Yes you can", Phil replied. "If you want to stop worrying about it you can, you know who you can ask for help with that burden."

"Certainly not you!", she snapped back.

"Well we both know that!", Phil retored just as angry as she was.

"But that's what ruined my marriage. If you're going to trip on it too, then we don't have any better chance of getting along then Sharon and I did or you and Jack did.

"You would have me ashamed of darn near everything I believe in or do", Phil told Vanessa. "Well I'm not going for it, you have your conscience and I have mine, so don't start telling me how I should live my life. Darn, you're just like Sharon!"

"If we can't plead the fifth amendment right not to saying anything that we think might hurt our case, then I don't want to go anyfurther with this relationship, maybe we should just be friends, even though you're the best thing I ever had."

Vanessa thought about it for a minute and Phil wondered if she make the same decision that Sharon had made. She had sworn that he was making her too miserable for living, so she had done the samething to him. They put up with each other for a long time before he agreed to leave, like she had often asked, sometimes in the form of a demand. It was against her religion to leave him unless he was unfaithful and since he never had been as far as she knew, she could not just divorce him. However she was willing to end the marriage if he would initiate the divorce, this she saw as more legitimate. Phil had stubbornly refused for a long time because he thought that an imperfect father like him was better then no father or a surrogate chosen by Sharon. She figure she could find as good a husband as Phil out there, as long as she could start looking before she started loosing her looks.

Phil leaned over the VCR trying to fix it for Sally, the tape he had removed was badly mangled. Then phone rang quickly two times, which was Phil's "distinctive ring from the phone company for his office line.

"Do you want me to answer it?", Sharon asked, she could see he was still involved with the VCR.

"Yes please!", he told her.

A few seconds later as he was just finishing, she informed him, "it's Mr. Tanaka from Sukiya Company."

"Oh!", Phil jumped up and started jogging towards the basement where his office was. This could be an important call he thought to himself.

It took ten seconds to get to his tiny office, put on the phone headset and sit down, he was a little out of breath.

"Hello, this is Phil Glencoe", he said carefully.

"Hello, this is Tanaka", the voice on the other end said seductively. Mr. Tanaka was unusual for a Japanese businessman and Phil sensed that this was going to be an unusual conversation.

"How are you?", Tanaka asked in his smooth silky voice.

"Very well", Phil replied trying to keep in proper decorum.

"It's been a beautiful day here", Tanaka continued.

There was a second's pause and then both men spoke almost simultaneously. "That's nice, it's been a little ...", Phil started but his words collided with Tanaka's.

"That is if you care to know", Tanaka said.

There was another second of awkward silence and then Phil said, "oh I do care to know."

That seemed to break the ice and Tanaka spoke again. "I'm calling about the industrial CO2 laser market research, I still don't know if they are going to ask you to do it. It depends on some business they are doing on the west coast right now."

"Yes I remember you telling me that in our last conversation", Phil replied.

"Yes", said Tanaka. "They are having a rough time in their discussions now, so I think you have a chance, but it is small."

Phil was confused, because he didn't remember their last conversation very well, it had not been in depth. Tanaka began to explain.

"They are talking to a major buyer. If they can agree to each other's terms, then our client will have a good business here in the lasers", Tanaka told Phil. "If they have a good business they will not need your services. So I think you had better pray that they don't agree with this buyer."

Phil was taken aback a little, not understanding how these pieces were all supposed to fit together logically. Tanaka apparently didn't sense Phil's confusion.

After another awkward silence, Phil spoke up, "could you say that again, I'm not sure I..."

Tanaka politely interrupted, "if they have a good business with this big buyer, they won't need your report, but if they can't agree on the terms, then they may still need your report."

Phil understood now, if they failed to reach an agreement with this major buyer and still wanted to sell their CO2 lasers in the U.S. they would need market information. With the big buyer as a partner however, there would be no need for Phil's services.

Phil was still in a serious display mode and spoke accordingly, "we hope that regardless of the decision, they will still want good information on the market."

"No, no!", said Tanaka baitingly, "if they succeed they will not need your report at all, you'd better pray for them to disagree."

"Okay, maybe I will pray for them to disagree", he said, finally coming out of his shell of business protocol.

"Oh, but then maybe you won't go to Heaven!", Tanaka shot back at him with a very slight hint of a chuckle.

"Okay, maybe I won't pray for them to disagree!", Phil was into the wacky side conversation and played along.

Tanaka got a little serious now, maybe it was really a serious subject to him and he was only approaching it humorously to hide his discomfort with the topic.

"Why?", he asked. "No one has ever come back from there, why are you worried about it?"

"Some people have had near death experiences and claim to have come very close...", Phil explained.

"Well! That can't be proven, that doesn't mean...", Tanaka's voice grew more serious still, but it was Phil who politely interrupted this time.

"That's true", Phil said. "They can't really prove anything, maybe those near death experiences are just our brains last gasp."

He said the last three words, "brains last gasp", very carefully so that he would be sure that Tanaka would understand him. Phil wasn't sure if Tanaka would understand that he was trying to be funny. He was also trying not to cross the line of getting directly into religion, because he feared it might be too controversial a thing to discuss with his Japanese counterpart, who he barely knew.

"Ah, ha, ha, ha!", Tanaka almost roared with laughter, but he restrained himself to a more appropriate laugh. It appeared to Phil that he had played the right card in his attempt to establish rapport with Tanaka.

The conversation wound down, to a few related closing remarks and polite goodbyes from each man. Phil shook his head as he hung up the phone and smiled. He ran up the stairs to tell Sharon about his weird conversation, maybe she would find it funny.

"What time do I have to leave for my class, is it 6:30?", Sharon thought out loud.

"I guess I'll just make hamburger helper", she told Phil. "The kids won't like it, but they don't like anything anyway."

"Yeah", said Phil, returning to his office. "They're impossible to please anyway."

"I may be a f---ing glutton like you say I am", Phil told Vaughn. "But I'm not f---ing glutton for punishment, that's why I don't volunteer much information to you."

"I don't ask you anything and I sure don't care what you do with your life", his former good friend replied offendedly.

"No, no, you don't ever ask me anything, you just constantly quiz and interrogate me, so you know as much as possible about what I doing. You're just so insecure, worried and out of control in your life that you want to run, I mean ruin mine too."

"I don't want to know everything you're doing", Vaughn countered. "But I do want to keep you from screwing people, so I have a right to keep an eye on you."

"Then you can sure I'll keep on keeping my personal business private and answer even less of your stupid questions", Phil finished.

The two men had been friends for many years before they started parting in their ways and beliefs. Because of that they hadn't yet stopped hanging out, even though it seemed they had almost nothing in common anymore. This was the opposite of how it had been in the old days when they were growing up back east.

"What?", Phil inquired.

**I MUST HAVE GOT OUT OF BED ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD OR... THE
BEGINNING OF THE END**

Phil's plan was to make as much money as possible from ripping off the big Japanese and American companies then invest it in Columbian or Jamaican or even Mexican.

He figured he was ripping the companies off with his market research reports. They were paying him a lot of money to interview large numbers of experts and get reliable data on the U.S. market for high tech equipment. He was making a minimal number of calls and then largely improvising the rest. Phil took the con in consultant literally, he had from the nearly the beginning.

"It makes it so that sometimes you can't sit still and you need to move. You can't stay seated, you'd squirm, instead you just got to get up and boogie or play a sport or walk or something. This is all related to the reason that the man don't like the stuff. He don't want you to see that his way isn't the only way and he's not into the boogy woogy at work."

"Do you use the stuff", Vaughn demanded.

"Don't be ridiculous!", Phil replied trying to deflect the question.

"Well!", Vaughn asked again. "Do you?"

Phil had thought about his answer to these questions many times, "your question is ridiculous, if I answer, you'll just ask me more so I'm telling you `nada'".

"You're obviously hiding something", Vaughn said scrutinizing his acquaintance. He saw Phil as a threat to his cult and wanted something he could pin on him when the time came.

"If you don't like it lump it", Phil replied while getting up to leave the room. He didn't appreciate being interogated every time he had to meet with the man.

"I'm against abortion, but I don't think I'd ever fight to stop it", Phil reflected as he entered the office of the pastor.

The old man looked up from his papers. "Well then I think you're wrong", he said.

"I can believe whatever I want, be a coniseur of anything I want and do whatever I want as long as I don't hurt anyone else and this church should leave me alone", Phil plopped down in a chair and sighed a big sigh.

"You're wrong about that too, Phil", the old man went on, "because you don't seem to know when you're hurting others sometimes."

"Well I'm gonna follow the dictates of my own conscience not your's", the younger man protested.

"I'm not talking about my conscience", the Pastor went on. "I'm talking about the word of God."

"That's easy for you to say, Pastor, but every other guy out there seems to know what God want's and if a guy listens to all of them, he'd never be able to do anything", Phil defended his position.

"I'm not talking about what people say about God, I'm talking about what's written down in his Bible. It's all right down on paper, clear as can be", the old Pastor argued.

"Yeah, it's written down on paper, but it's not clear, everyone tells me it means something different", Phil continued debating.

"Well all the major churches agree on a few things, so those are the things you must adhere to", the old man concluded and went back to reading his Bible.

"I don't know what to think", Phil said, rising out of the comfortable over stuffed chair. He knew that the old man had concluded his remarks and it was time for him to go though, that had been made clear by his going back fastidiously to his scriptures.

"Melisa flips out when I tell her half the truth", Jack said. "There's no way I'm gonna tell her the whole truth about how I feel about things."

"So this is what you do!", Sharon scolded sarcastically. "You go for one of your so called rides in the country for half and hour, then come down here and kick this punching bag and excersise for another half and hour. You sure are working hard!"

"That's the whole idea", Phil tried to deflect her attack. "The whole idea is to do what you want with your life, not be a prisoner to the rat race."

"Well it's no wonder the bills aren't getting paid", Sharon threw the plate at him and attacked. Her fingernails dug into his throat as he squirmed, pinned in his recliner. After a couple of seconds, she let go and he rose. Smack he slapped her good and hard across the face.

"Don't you ever do that to me again!", his girlfriend yelled.

Maybe we are the dust mites of the Universe, blown here by the breath of God. Maybe in this infinite universe, we're as widespread as dust", Phil imagined.

"I hardly think so", said Jack. "I think you're letting your imagination get carried away."

"I expect the same fifth amendment rights to be respected by you as I'd get from the government", PHil told her.

"I also have declared Independence from the government", Phil went on. "But I haven't declared it from you and I'd like to keep it that way"

"As far as the government is concerned, I'd like them to treat me as an independent state. I will treat them the same."

"Wow, you've really lost it now", Sharon said, her eyes opening wider.

"I just want to excersise my God given right to the pursuit of happiness. I won't hurt society and I expect for it not to hurt me."

"You are crazy and you already are hurting society", Sharon retorted. "Look at your life, it stinks, everything you do is detrimental to society."

"Well that's your opinion", PHil said defensively. "I know you're at least partly right and I'm trying to change things. With a little help from above maybe I will."

"You're possessed!", Sharon said, not knowing for sure whether she believed her diagnosis of him or not. "You think you're the Messiah or something, don't you?"

"If I ever did, I was suffering from delusions and I would be ashamed to even admit to doing that, because it's probably blasphemous. I just hope and pray that I'm doing something on the plus side, not the negative. I don't have any direct line to anyone, so all I've got to go on is my own conscience and gut feelings. I'm not going to voluntarily forfeit those and go by someone else's."

"There are a lot of things you can do while your're talking and there a few things you can't. I'd rather do than talk and you'd rather talk than do, so don't you think it's a drag to be around you?", he told the man.

"There are lots of things worth doing, but not that many worth talking about. Espeically when all that talking keeps you from doing the worthwhile things.

"No one has the right to run me into the ground, work me like a dog and wear me out", Phil said.

"You're doing it to yourself worse than anyone else is", Sharon defended herself.

"Yeah, but I'm doing it to me, not to you", Phil replied.

"Just as I want the right to privacy from my government, I also want it from my family, friends and everyone else. I'll leave you're private life alone if you're not hurting someone and I'd appreciate the same from you. When you or government or anyone else

Phil was pulled over because the police officer told him he wanted to give him a citation for driving safely. It was very ironic this time Phil was caught in the act. It was also a little suspicious when Phil saw in the rearview mirror that Vaughn was pulling up on the shoulder behind his own car.

"What are you going to do now", Vaughn sneered at Phil. "Take on the whole U.S. Govenrment with your hands tied behind his back?"

Phil didn't answer except to himself, "yes, behind my back and barehanded, unfortuneatly." He knew he was taking on the whole U.S. government and the whole world's government whether he liked it or not.

On the radio as he was hauled away from his car was the song "If you don't like the way I'm living, you just leave this long haired country boy alone", by CDB.

"Change that to God is great, Religion can be bunk", Phil said as he walked back into the Pastors office. Sitting down he began a conversation, this time trying to be less judgemental and more conciliatory.

Mind your own business and I'll mind mine", Phil told the neighbor.

"You seem to know so well what's best for me, that you've forgotten that we should worry about the mote in our own eye, not the one that may be in our neighbors."

"My best friends pet peeve is number two on my list and other peoples are after that. My own pet peeve is number one with me, just as my friends is number one with him", Phil said.

"Oh that's real profound", Vaughn said sarcastically.

"I'll be your friend, but I'm telling you right now my goal is to convert you so we'll see more eye to eye", Phil told the devil worshipper.

"Well I won't!", Vaughn spat out. "Maybe I could if you were some other type of heathen, but you worship the devil, so unless you repent I won't eve be your friend."

Vaughns words made Phil wonder if he had been out of line with that comment as he looked at the young man's black clothing and spider and snakes jewelry. After all, he was just about ready to apply to join the local church.

"I just found a million dollars someone forgot...inside out and upside down", Guns and Roses.

Joey meanwhile was explaining to Sharon about the business project he was doing in his third grade class. She listened attentively as usual, while Phil who was also stuffing envelopes, heard it only out of the corner of his ear.

Phil heard Joey say the number 666 and his ears perked up. Alarmedly, Sharon reacted, speaking to the boy in a fast pitched voice.

"666, that's not a good number to choose", she told him urgently. "That's the number that the Bible says it very, very bad."

Joey was not sure of the meaning of all this, but it did jog his memory about something that he knew was bad. "I picked 555 for the first prize", he said defending himself. "666 was only for the grand prize."

Phil listened with interest and wondered what the boy meant by that, but figured it was very innocent on his part. It was also interesting to see Sharon's carefully measured response.

"I'm not saying you're bad or that you did anything wrong", she told her son. "I'm just saying you should choose a different number than 666."

"I will", Joey said hastily. He didn't want to blaspheme even though he didn't even know what the word blaspheme meant. He did know that when mom spoke in that tone of voice it was important and he knew that the Bible was more important then mom or apple pie.

Joey came back down the stairs to Phil's office, he looked only a tiny bit shaken, but he had learned a lesson.

Phil couldn't resist a little joke, "whatever possessed you to pick that number." Joey didn't seem to get the joke even though Phil had accented the word possessed.

"I didn't mean anything Dad", Joey said.

Phil was a little embarrassed that he was joking about that number, especially since the boy did not get it.

"Dad, I can't lick anymore envelopes right now, Mom want's me to clean my room. Thanks for the fifty cents", Joey said.

"Thank you", Phil replied looking at the pile of fifty-some-odd envelopes that his son had licked and or taped shut.

"Yeah and Mom's not paying me for cleaning my room", through his sticky tongue.

"That's volunteer work, huh?", Phil said with a chuckle.

"I know", the boy laughed back as he left the little office cubical.

"Only use your powers for self defense and other good", Phil told Joey as he finished punishing the punching bag with punches and kicks.

Vaughn came in unexpectedly, having been let in by Sharon while the boys were in the basement.

"So who are practicing beating up", he sneered.

"I'm practicing defense, not beating up", Phil answered out of the side of his mouth, never looking at his neighbor.

"It doesn't look like self defense to me", Vaughn said back with one of his rare smiles. "And who do you need to defend yourself from anyway."

"People like you and other tougher people that you would like to throw me in with", Phil said letting go of a big side kick to the heavy bag.

"Well it will never work", Vaughn sneered thinking that a little torture would do Phil a lot of good.

"I'll just harden my shell, I can't help it", Vanessa said when she heard about Phil's addiction.

"Yes you can", Phil replied. "If you want to stop worrying about it you can, you know who you can ask for help with that burden."

"Certainly not you!", she snapped back.

"Well we both know that!", Phil retored just as angry as she was.

"But that's what ruined my marriage. If you're going to trip on it too, then we don't have any better chance of getting along then Sharon and I did or you and Jack did.

"You would have me ashamed of darn near everything I believe in or do", Phil told Vanessa. "Well I'm not going for it, you have your conscience and I have mine, so don't start telling me how I should live my life. Darn, you're just like Sharon!"

"If we can't plead the fifth amendment right not to saying anything that we think might hurt our case, then I don't want to go anyfurther with this relationship, maybe we should just be friends, even though you're the best thing I ever had."

Vanessa thought about it for a minute and Phil wondered if she make the same decision that Sharon had made. She had sworn that he was making her too miserable for living, so she had done the samething to him. They put up with each other for a long time before he agreed to leave, like she had often asked, sometimes in the form of a demand. It was against her religion to leave him unless he was unfaithful and since he never had been as far as she knew, she could not just divorce him. However she was willing to end the marriage if he would initiate the divorce, this she saw as more legitimate. Phil had stubbornly refused for a long time because he thought that an imperfect father like him was better then no father or a surrogate chosen by Sharon. She figure she could find as good a husband as Phil out there, as long as she could start looking before she started loosing her looks.

Phil leaned over the VCR trying to fix it for Sally, the tape he had removed was badly mangled. Then phone rang quickly two times, which was Phil's "distinctive ring from the phone company for his office line.

"Do you want me to answer it?", Sharon asked, she could see he was still involved with the VCR.

"Yes please!", he told her.

A few seconds later as he was just finishing, she informed him, "it's Mr. Tanaka from Sukiya Company."

"Oh!", Phil jumped up and started jogging towards the basement where his office was. This could be an important call he thought to himself.

It took ten seconds to get to his tiny office, put on the phone headset and sit down, he was a little out of breath.

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"It's been a beautiful day here", Tanaka continued.

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"What time do I have to leave for my class, is it 6:30?", Sharon thought out loud.

"I guess I'll just make hamburger helper", she told Phil. "The kids won't like it, but they don't like anything anyway."

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"It's time for a Marriage Bill of Rights", said Phil. "Complete with the right to privacy and the right to plead the fifth."

"Well if you do all that, it's not a marriage anymore", objected Vaughn. "That goes totally against the marriage vows."

"No it doesn't, not any more than the Bill of Rights goes against the constitution", Phil argued.

"Well I'm sure wives everywhere, especially your's will just love that stupid idea!", Vaughn laughed.

Phil remembered his father's words about being a consultant to the Japanese. "You could do a poor job for them, and since they rotate their U.S. staff every three or four years, there will always be enough companies to exploit, but you wouldn't want to do that."

When Phil had heard those words, he heard a little bell go off in his head that meant, why not?

Sharon wanted to renew their vows. She had in mind a little chapel in Gattlingburg and a smiling pastor and all the traditional stuff. "If we do it", Phil said, it will be with a marriage bill of rights or constitution or something. We'll mesh it out ahead of time and we'll do what we should have done the first time. We'll state who owns what, who does what.."

"What are you *talking about*?", Sharon said in alarm. The last thing she wanted was some crazy 'new age' marriage contract.

"We'll decide about sex, money, how much to spend on Christmans, how to celebrate holidays, religion for the kids, all the things that I wish we had ironed out when we did it the first time..."

Sharon was livid, "forget it!, if you want to be stupid about it then just forget the whole thing."

Sharon wanted to know everything and Phil was starting to realize that it was best to tell her. He was retreating from the don't volunteer anything point of view. It seemed to make them closer if he volunteered information to her, he just had to be willing to stand firm and face her anger from time to time. But if he could, then it made their relationship stronger, because there are few things that appear more weaselish to a woman than a man who's afraid to tell the woman in his life the truth.

He wasn't sure why she wanted to know everything, he thought that maybe it was a status thing with the other woman, to be the most in the know about what the men were up to. He used to think it was a control thing, with her wanting to know his every move, so she could try and control him. Now he believed that it was a different type of control thing, with the woman needing to know where she stands all the time, so she can be more in control of her life. Phil thought that this was an insecurity complex that lots of people have and felt sorry for them. He on the other hand had his own problems so he didn't think anyone needed his piety.

Everything we do is propoganda, because everything we do is meant and designed to have an effect on our fellows.

The garage door's handle hit the basement doors handle with a clang. This was Phil's new warning system.

I wish you'd just be natural and stop trying to outsmart everyone all the time.

I don't like having to try to outsmart you all the time, but I think you're partly to blame for it too.

My wife and I are President and Vice President of this home and family. The kids should not let the parents divorce if they can help it. The parents should not divorce if they can at all help it. I am the president and Sharon is about as powerful as Hillary another words she want's to be influential in the government, just like she wants to win the battle of the sexes between her and me.

"You're an interesting character", Phil told Sharon. "I like that in a mate."

"Homosexuality is abnormal, but it's a natural-abnormality, because it does occur in nature. Do monkeys start exhibiting homosexual behavior because of monkey gay bars? In my opinion the answer is yes, although monkey peer pressure may be a better answer. Or do they start exhibiting homosexual behavior because of environmental conditions like stress, or even because of genetic predisposition. Probably all of the above can be contributory causes. I tend to believe it's a natural abnormality in humans too, caused by gay bars and peer pressure, environmental stress or genetic predisposition usually in some combinations of the above.

"I'm a hypocrite and a liar worse then the average guy", Phil admittingly. "I'm not proud of it, but if what I can tell about other people is right, I'm not doing very good."

"Daddy, what's that in your hand?", asked Joey. The boy was suspicious and had a pretty good idea what it was. Afterall, his young eyes were pretty good.

Phil clenched his fist, "it's none of your business what's in my hand!"

Joey was a little scared and didn't ask anything else, but this confirmed in his mind what he had believed for three years. It confirmed to him that his dad still smoked and it confirmed to him that his father lied to him about it.

Joey had caught his father in the act once before at a cookout. That time, Phil had lied about it because he felt coerced into lying. This time Phil didn't consider himself dishonest to the boy, he was telling him that it was none of his business. This was exactly what he planned on telling anyone else who might ask, if he didn't want them to know. They could arrive from that response with whatever conclusion they wanted, but as long as they weren't strong enough to wrestle his hands open, they would not bully him into answering.

However the world frequently reminded him it was ready, willing and able to wrestle his hands open. As far as that went, Phil figured he'd handle that as best he could, if and when the time came. He knew he was putting himself and his family at risk, since the consequences of his arrest would be bad for all of them. He really didn't want to quit and realized that this was selfish, but it was a hard addiction to break, even if he wanted to. On the other hand, he sometimes believed that he had the right to do what he wanted. After all the world was full of dangers to the family regardless. The tough thing to decide was whether or not he had an overwhelming responsibility to his family to avoid such a risk to them. Phil had selfishly taken the less noble route of doing his own thing and praying for God's help.

He wanted to admit the truth to the kids, but he believed Sharon was probably right that he should hold off as long as possible. The kids would figure it out for themselves, Phil decided he wouldn't lie about it again to the kids, he would try to get away with postponing the issue till they were older, but hopefully a silent understanding would develop. Maybe they could all respect each others choices and not go ballistic or become irrational. This was another of those uncertainties that Phil had to face. Another uncertainty

was about how he would handle himself in court and or jail if it it happened. Would he go down easy when they came for him or go down scratching, clawing and maybe shooting till the bitter end. Would he tell the truth or lie to try and save his ass. He knew which one he rather do, but he'd never exactly had brass cucumbers.

The same thing applied for anything else "they" might try to bust him for, such as the music he liked, the way he thought about things or the way he recognized and tried to interpreted God in his life. It was unlikely that he would ever be inside the popular sheep folds that offered people so much security. That was fine with him except that it was unfortunately another threat to him and his. The sheep would no doubt come bleating and biting down upon them all.

The recent examples of the rebellion in Los Angeles and the riots in Lucasville were further evidence that the authorities will not protect the weak.

"I don't ever want to divorce you or leave you", Phil told Sharon. "And I hope I never do. I hope you'll do the same for me."

"I'll love and put up with you as long as you love and put up with me. I think both of us have had a hard time sometimes doing those things, but at least we're together and hopefully moving in the right direction. I'll try and stop blaming you for my problems and hopefully you do the same for me. It may get even tougher for us in the future with us aging and all the worlds temptations. So I'm gonna be blunt as hell with you tell you to stay out of the damn sun at the pool. You and I both know that I'm gonna be tempted by younger women, unfortunately for women, that's part of man's nature. You're gonna be tempted too, but I think women get fewer offers as they get older because of the obvious. Men get more offers as they get older because women look at us a little differently than we look at them. I almost hate to tell you any of this, but you always say you want the truth. You might know all of this already anyway, so what I'm trying to do is admit that I'm thinking these things and clear the air. I'm sorry if I've said too much and pissed you off.

Phil waited for Sharon's reaction, he had no idea what to expect and knew he wa the one who would face the consequences of her wrath. She had earned his trust and he didn't mind not keeping anymore secret from her, but he still wished that she wouldn't ask him so many questions. Whether she cared or even realized it, her questions often caused him problems. Just as she always wanted to know exactly what he was scheming, his "involved" friends often asked, "is Sharon home or does Sharon know about this?"

If he was honest with them too, then it led to them being caused stress too. They were usually trying to keep things cool around their houses, so they also tried to keep things under wraps. These friends saw Phil as possibly a loose canon who was pussywhipped. The natural thing for them to do would be to drop Phil, which he of course didn't want.

Being married with children, Phil was able to see a young female growing up, and an adult female maturing. If he had been able to learn about women from observing Sharon, Sally and others, it would have spared them all a lot of grief.

One thing he believed in, was that life was a constant matching of wits and clashing arguments with her, whether he liked it or not. He had not figured out a way to have life with her anything else, although he wished for peace with her. She might say that if her were completely honest with her, that things would be a little better and she was right. But something made it hard for him to be as honest as she wanted, there were things in his mind that he didn't want to bear. Was it his obligation to tell her everything she asked, or should he tell her even more. That would be being even more honest with her. It seemed to him

that she was as bad as him though, since she wanted to know everything but would not forgive him for telling her the things that hurt her. In his mind she was as guilty of wanting to have her cake and eat it too, as he was.

Regardless of all their problems, he believed that she was like that because she was just human. She probably did a better job of being selfless than he did and he hoped that things would work out for them long term. and that she

"We're you doing what I think you were doing?", Vaughn said highly suspicious.

"That's personal and none of your business", Phil replied irritably. This was only about the tenth time that Vaughn had put him on the spot about this.

"Like I've told you before, it is my business and I already know the answer", Vaughn said while thinking about how he would like to get a confession out of Phil even if it killed him. He was not thinking about how he would most of all like to torture it out of Phil, but on his subconscious level, he was fantasizing about just that.

"Then I'll tell you", Phil said. Vaughn's constant harassment was wearing him down. "But you have to keep what I tell you secret."

Vaughn laughed, "why should I keep secret, what I already know. You want me to keep common scuttlebutt knowledge to myself, no way."

"Sometimes all you know about a kid is that you love her or him. Other than that you don't really how smart, or dumb or good or bad that child will be.

"It's called hardball, because that's what it is", Phil lectured Joey. "That hard ball hurts and they play to win, so you've got to decide if it's the game for you. In any case, I hope that it won't be the only thing in your life. Be something else too, whatever it is, so you'll have something else to do when the ball games end.

"What was that", said the neighbor seeing a plumb of smoke leave the window where Phil was standing looking out of the basement.

"That was radon gas that I was exhaling", Phil said with a perfectly straight face. "I accidentally breath in a lot of it down here, so periodically I come to this window and blow it out of my lungs. There can be a lot in there sometimes.

"I'll still love you even when we're both just a bag of bones", Phil said very un-romantically. "That means I'll love you for eternity."

"Treat her like a lady", the old man whispered into his ear. Of course only Phil could see him or hear him, but he did what the old man suggested.

Sharon didn't know what to say.

Chapter One

I MUST HAVE GOT OUT OF BED ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD

Actually our story starts with a bad bout of morning sickness, a difficult pregnancy and a man who never stuck around to see what he had wrought.

It was the cyclical nature of life which interested Phil. In one sense these cycles were beautiful, but sometimes they seemed cruel. Men work and compete to earn power and status for themselves and to provide the means for women to adorn themselves. Women adorn themselves and compete to win the most powerful male they can get and adorn themselves to attract and keep that "provider" and "protector". The men naturally "provide and protect" as long as the women are appealing to them. The natural instinct of man would be to tend to move on to a new female or females. He would do this as long as he is a prime male just like a lion. After his strength and virility is diminished, he would be supplanted by a younger stronger male and run off.

In society however this would leave the women at a disadvantage so God or man or woman or nature has set up a system of mating for life. This provides some measure of security to all involved, but goes against the man's natural instinct to spread his seed far and wide and to pursue the most attractive young females. If he was without a conscience or coercion, he would might not adhere to this system. Nowadays it is argued by some that this system is no longer valid and argued by others that it's as valid as ever. Without it however, women and children and maybe men would suffer to an extent that I don't know.

Phil finished his pontification, Sharon and Vaughn sneered in disgust.

"That must be sick-o sermon number 99 that I've heard out of you", Sharon said.

"It's also complete nonsense", said Vaughn. "Since you and your evolutionist cronies think we came from apes, you should compare humans to them and not lions. Apes mate for life, they are not the philanderers that you are."

"Well maybe we didn't descend from apes", Phil weakly rebutted.

The question", Sharon asked. "Is if you'll do the right thing and hit the road Jack."

"Yes that would make things easy for you wouldn't it", Phil smirked back. "After I pay for all these nice things you have, you want to throw me out."

"Well admit it, you want me to!", she screamed, "so you can go out with those young floosies and desert me."

Phil tried to change the subject abruptly, "you're too worried, you're the one who's running on all eight cylinders, not me. You'll look fine to me forever, whether they find the fountain of youth or not. I don't want you to change anything about yourself unless you want to and it's extremely tried, tested and proven safe.

"You and your sweet talk", she said. She was hoping it wasn't fake, that would make her sick.

"Ah, Yeah", Phil went on. "You're in great shape and maturing like a fine wine, why your machine's in such great shape that it purrs like a kitten all night long, no sleep apnea with you."

Now she was liking it less, "that's enough stop talking, before you wish you had."

"We can't live without each other", Phil told his assaulter, in his momentary flash back to prison.

"The only thing is", Jack said, "is that it's Americans that will be killed doing this mercenary work."

"Well we have a volunteer army already, we could make participation in all wars to save Bosnians or anyone else voluntary. I don't think your government should make you fight a war you don't want to fight anyway."

"That's crazy as heck", Jack voice got louder, "It's not very smart to do that. What if foreign ships, bombs and planes are attacking us. If people don't have to serve then, we'd be in big trouble."

"Yeah, but if the country isn't worth fighting for at that point, then it's probably not worth saving anyway. I can't imagine virtually Americans volunteering in the hundreds of millions if such an attack was imminent", Phil rebutted his friend.

"But that's not how those attacks happen", Jack said back. "They happen when you let big strong nations get stronger than you, or they conspire against you."

"Yeah that's hard to fight", Phil shrugged. "That's when you trust in God to provide you with good intelligence. You can be better prepared that way and if you're out there doing the right thing in the world God may decide to protect your country."

HOLD EVERYTHING!

"Ouch!", Vaughn shouted and grabbed his nose.

Phil had just elbowed him accidentally on purpose.

"Sorry, but that's what you get when you stick your nose where it doesn't belong", Phil defended himself.

As Vaughn massaged his nose and tried to clear his head, Phil stashed things.

The meeting with Mr. Sekiyama was not going well. "What do you mean you still own that building and that you have people there who as you said, "quote pay the rent".

"That's what I mean", Phil replied. "They pay the rent".

He was being as vague as possible with Sekiyama, in an attempt to save face. Phil was trying to get out of the corner he had backed himself into, but he wanted to do it without retracting any statements he had made. True or false, he wanted to avoid discussing the subject in detail with his Japanese client. He believed that in this case he could come out of this meeting smelling like a rose if he just took the wheel and got in the drivers seat. If he admitted a mistake, that would open him up for even more extreme scrutiny. He had been taught not to admit being wrong or anything else in this type of business case. In fact within reason, brash, assertive action was usually the order of the day.

If you give them an inch, they'll take a mile. Cause if it's not what you smoke that they don't like, then it's your music or your religion or your nose or your skin. It's a damn shame when anyone uses these kinds of things to deprive someone of life or liberty. Their strongest admonition should be do not do it

and unless were doing something else then we pose no threat to them and we have the right to resist any way we want. They may win, but we have done what we believed was right. We should not be a threat to anyone and should try not to go out like ranch apocolypse. We should not threaten law enforcement, because like everyone else sometimes they "no not what they do".

"They just know how to change this place by killing everyone in the human race ... they'll even kill you for a cigarette ... that's Sting or the Police", said Phil.

"I don't know if that's exactly what they said?", he said reconsidering.

"Mom, I think you should acknowledge that there is a God and if you think about it you'll see that it's as logical as the stars in the sky. There is a rhyme and reason to it and we just aren't significant enough to be privy to the nuts and bolts of it all. When your loved ones died and you questioned God, you were normal. You were justified in asking God for justice for the ones that departed far too soon. God may have already granted more justice than we can imagine in his grand design. He usually doesn't tell us personally that those loved ones are probably in a much better place than this world. If we ask him though, he will tell us the truth about these things. One of the things he does not like, is for us to think that we don't need him. We need to think about that and then ask him to forgive and save us.

"So you need to win a few trophies to stop being insecure about yourself. You need something on the mantle to prove your own self worth, because even you don't believe in it", Vaughn provoked..

"Hah!", Phil replied defensively. "How can you bellyache about a little insignificant thing like me wanting to compete in over 35's tennis matches."

"I deplore and don't believe in all the superiority myths and legends that you perpetuated about your race. Equally I don't for a minute believe of the racial and ethnic stereotypes you use to slander others", Phil retorted.

THE ENTROPY AND THE ECSTASY

The traffic on the Garden State Parkway was as heavy as usual and Phil was preparing to take the usual measures to speed the trip up.

He had gotten on several exits ago and was now at the point where he knew it would be an hour and a half commute if he didn't do something drastic. The drastic measure that he so often did, was to just drive on the shoulder and breeze past all the decent citizens that were patiently waiting for the traffic to start slowly rolling again.

A man like Phil could not easily abide with an extra half hour commute, especially when it would mean sitting in a long line of traffic. His patience level was high for some things, but this was not one of them and he typically took the dangerous course of action rather than sit frustrated behind the wheel.

He sped up, reaching 35 miles per hour on the shoulder, passing the cars like they were standing still.

I like living where I do", said Phil, "'It's near my children."

"Isn't that awkward", said the interviewer, "I mean being near your ex-wife's house and having to deal with her."

"I don't mind", Phil said, "I'll always be in love with her, no matter what she thinks and I want the best for my kids, so that means I want the best for her too."

The interviewer looked surprised. "Well shoot, then why don't you two get back together, it sounds like you can save your marriage."

Phil wasn't so sure it could be saved, he hadn't been the most faithful guy in the world since their separation, he hadn't even waited for the divorce to be final before he started fooling around.

That's between "she and me", said Phil in a poor imitation of a Bogart voice - there was no way he wanted to get into the details of his marriage, divorce or love life. As soon as they had separated, he had begun hanging out in bars and playing the field as well as only hiring women now in hopes of a liaison.

Phil had come to the conclusion that religious people from all backgrounds were equally bloodthirsty.

Sharon had flipped out the night before over him wanting to go smoke with a friend during an interfamily Usher game.

Smoking was like going for a long relaxing drive a long road. The difference was that you didn't need to leave your chair to do it. "Lazy man, lazy, that's what you are", Sharon said as she saw Phil drag the shelves up the front steps of the house. "Damn things must weigh 35 pounds a piece", said Phil as he hauled the three boxes inside.

DON'T PLACE AN ORDER WITH THE NEW WORLD ORDER

What if boiled down to is that he wasn't going to make many more apologues and he wasn't going to let anyone tell him what to do - period.

He told the marriage counselor that he did some of his little "things", because he thought it would help keep their marriage alive. Unfortunately Sharon didn't always see the humor in his attempts and she saw what Phil was doing as playing mind games.

"You've changed so much, you're just not the same person that I married!", Sharon told Phil and the marriage counselor.

"I think I'm basically the same", Phil responded, "you may be a better judge of it than me, but I'm not going to let you be the judge, the man upstairs is the only one that really knows what's inside of either of us - he'll judge."

"I'm like you", Phil said to Sharon, "I just want to have my cake and eat it too." She was not impressed by his homespun wisdom. "I'll settle for less than that though, will you Phil?", her question unsettled him.

"Babe, I'm not trying to mess you up, but I'm planning on doing things my way for now on and no one's gonna stop me except with a bullet or something, this is declaration of Independence time! I hope that you'll stay by my side, but that's the way it's gonna be. I'm going back to my African roots or whatever

you want to call it, but I'm coming out of my shell and praying to the God in Heaven that I do the right thing."

He believed that with a little bit of help from above, he might be able to survive the aches, pains and unseen ailments that he was beginning to suffer from and live till he was 100 years old. Really though, 50 years would be a pretty realistic life expectancy for him - if he didn't start eating less and living more healthfully. "Heck with a little help from above, I might even be cured from some of these pains."

"If there's a God who will save me if I believe in him in spite of my screwing up on an almost continual basis, then I should be okay - if not then I'm screwed."

Sharon was not impressed, "lighten up or at practice what you preach", she reminded him.

"Yeah, I'll come right out and say it. "I think that women and blacks are more emotional than white men and furthermore there are a lot more differences than that, but I won't mention any more. Call me racist or prejudice or whatever, I'm just speaking my mind! And you know what, you can't take it when I speak my mind! In fact it looks like you're getting ready to take a swing at me right now", Phil woke up with a start - another dream.

You always have to worried if you're really willing to speak your mind. "I could say one thing that I believe about blacks, women, left wing whites, right wing whites, asians and get my self killed."

"you never know where it's coming from said Vaughn, "so you can't worry about it, just say what you think about anyone or anything, you might not live as long, but you'll be a better off man for it."

"Just like me saying, I think that whites are generally smarter than blacks", Vaughn spoke, "I demand the right to be able to say that because I believe that and I am not ashamed of believing it."

By now Phil would have been shocked, if he didn't know Vaughn better.

"I also believe that blacks are superior to whites physically and that they should not be ashamed of it, in fact I think they're proud of it", Vaughn was verbally on a roll.

"And both races and everyone else has the right to his own beliefs about who he is, who his people are and who God is", that's the main thing I think that we need government for, just to ensure us the free exercise of those rights."

"I don't want a government that guarantees me or anyone else a free ride. Let's get rid of welfare now and deal with the consequences now, let's not pass this curse on to our children to have to tackle, let's take the leadership and be the generation that does it! Just guarantee everyone the right to do their own thing without interference from anyone - if and when they directly hurt someone else while doing this then prosecute them!" The basis of Vaughn's platform, would be in it's simplest form, "no free ride and freedom of choice."

In addition, regarding trade with Japan, the Individuality party would not blame Japan and we would have the policy that it's no-body's fault but ours even though we can find lots of offenses to American ethics in the way the Japanese have conducted business with America. However! Since we have gotten ourselves into this mess, we must take very strong measures to get our selves out of this hole and that means definite quotas on Japanese goods and other actions at least until we are back on our feet and prospering! This is just basic self defense on a national economic level, in Phil's opinion this was just

common sense. Phil liked the Japanese on a personal and business level, since he had found them as honorable as any Americans that he had dealt with, and since he had gotten into the consulting business, practically everyone was ethically cleaner than him.

Phil looked up at Vaughn and laughed, "and you'll probably change your mind on all this tomorrow anyway."

"Yeah, I might", Vaughn reacted defensively, "and if I do that's my right too!"

"As of now, I'm going to tell you guys the platform for the new "Individuality Party", Vaughn announced.

"I'm going to take on unfair Japanese trade practices head on and as a consultant to them Phil, your're just the guy to help me do it - if the public can forgive you for working for them."

He hasn't sure if he should just quit immediately or else phase it out quickly so that they wouldn't go broke and lose their home and other property.

Phil was guilty of working for the Japanese as a consultant and giving them market information to help them sell in the U.S.A., he had thus hurt American business and certain Americans on an individual basis, he knew he was accountable to these people and to the country. With his background of working for the Japanese, he knew a little about them and he didn't think that they were hatching some conspiracy to ruling or taking over the U.S.A. in any way, he thought instead that they just wanted full equality with Americans in terms of world power and prestige. These notions by Japan were in a lot of ways very threatening sounding to many Americans and possibly rightly so. In fact Phil acknowledged that he could be entirely wrong about the Japanese and though he doubted it, he admitted that it could be a Japanese conspiracy.

In any case - as for the consultant job, he would have to get out of it and do so as quickly as was realistically possible, it was just not right.

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"Remember that one person can make a difference", Vaughn didn't say it, Phil just heard it coming from the radio as his friend rambled on.

"Talent on loan from God, we think that it's okay that you're saying that", said the caller on the talk radio show.

"I wonder what those callers would think of your ideas", Phil asked Vaughn, "I don't know", Vaughn replied without much concern, "It probably would depend on if they think that overall "I'm going their way or someone else's."

Just then there was a crash at the door and a SWAT team in green camouflage outfits broke in through the old wooden door.

"Okay, where's the weed!", the leader shouted as he burst in.

"Where's your brains!", Vaughn screamed back. It was not a good time to come crashing in on Vaughn, and not a good time to say that to Sgt. Spike.

"I don't say decriminalize pot", said Phil, "I'm only saying that from my own self interest I'd like to not have to worry about going to jail." "I'm not saying decriminalize it unless that's what society as a large democratically decides."

For now on Phil was going to be a lot more selective about the types of consulting projects he did.

He'd also leave the big cruise ship poster up in his office all the time, unless he had a Japanese client come over regarding market research and that had never happened in his four years of being in business for himself.

Maybe it would inspire him or help drum up cruise sale business. Whenever anyone came to his office, he could tell them that he was an agent for the thirty-five largest pleasure cruise companies in the world.

His goal was to phase out the market research as soon as possible especially the most worst types of projects, which he would not do anymore. He would also work hard on selling cruises, their income would probably drop and it would be okay if it did, but he was hoping to somehow have even a better year than the last.

He hoped that Sharon would not have to work, but she had said that she would do so readily if necessary and that was a relief at the moment.

Do the youngsters, especially the blacks know that some of those expensive basketball and tennis shoes are made in China, BY SLAVE LABOR.

In the long run, in almost every disagreement that we have, deep down inside, you think that you can claim the moral high ground for yourself and that leaves nothing left for us to discuss. "Well I'm here to tell you that you can take your moral high ground and keep it to yourself for now on because I will search for my own."

"You and everyone else can just stop saying, 'yeah, yeah, yeah, we hear what you're saying, but you don't know what your're talking about', cause I'm not listening anymore, I'll make my own decisions right ones and wrong ones."

For now on he'd say, "I'm sorry", few times and far between.

"I'm not 100% sure that I'm on the right side of the battle", Vaughn said, "but I'm 100% sure that I want to be on that side."

Sharon felt sure that Vaughn had truly snapped this time. "He thinks he's Jesus", she muttered. Vaughn heard this and replied, "no way", but I believe he's coming back and it's his side that I hope and pray that I'm on." I'd be real happy just to carry his dirty clothes.

Phil had to keep reminding himself to relax and to settle down, stop worrying. He had declared his independence from the world and now he could just live his life instead of spending all of his time being careful not to do anything to offend others. The task now was to just do it and do it right!

As far as smoking, he'd do it as little as possible, but he'd be the absolute decider of that in his life, as long as he didn't go to jail over it. That was the thing that he resented the most about the laws governing it and why that was one U.S. law that he wouldn't obey. You might say it was a case of whose ox was getting gored, but you could say that about the people on both sides of the issue.

Now he was getting a little bit of it for a friend and he was trying to decide whether or not to keep a pinch for himself as a little undiscussed payment for his middleman roll. He was on his way to meet this same friend and Phil had a little bit with him and that brought up the second question. Should he give the friend a pinch hit of it now.

He knew that his buddy would only want one or two at the most so he decided to do it. This also made him feel like he was doing something to equal out the pinch he planned to take when he got it for Dan. All around a "greener" way of doing it, which was a bit surprising coming from a regular listener to the Number One conservative radio talk show in the world.

As it turned out the scenario unfolded perfectly, he shared a little with Dan and then Dan asked him to get him a little bit more. "I'll give you a nice pinch out of mine when I get it", Dan said.

Another thing Phil didn't want was for anyone to say they feel sorry for him. He didn't want anyone's sympathy or their forced cures.

"I have an idea for a program that would create thousands of jobs and help save thousands of lives", Vaughn said. It will be like the Job Corps of the 1930's, it can put thousands of people back to work and help stop traffic deaths, from people hitting trees, poles and other objects from the side of the road."

"Yeah, we'll offer these unemployed people fair paying jobs for removing trees, poles, fences or anything that's closer than 200 feet from any road and that could cause a serious accident.

People wouldn't have to take the jobs, but at least it would be an opportunity for people on public assistance to get back to work if they feel they need to for their own self-respect or any other reason. Low skilled people would fit in great, but so would highly skilled laborers and office workers that want to experience the thrill of using a chain saw.

And for the nature lovers, important trees could all be saved as long as they had protective barriers around them to prevent drivers from being killed in crashes. The job of clearing the sides in 200 feet from all roads would be hopelessly impractical because of houses and buildings that are in many areas less than 200 feet away, so that would only be a guideline. The main thing would be to make roadways everywhere safer since running into such objects may be the highest cause of single car crash fatalities.

Even if kept small in scope, this could take years and provide gainful employment to millions and a most valuable service to the public at the same time. The lives saved would be such a longterm benefit to society that the project would inevitably be worth its cost.

Phil was going to try to sell the consulting business for \$250,000. He felt different about selling his consulting business, than his father would feel about selling his. His father's business carried the family name in the company name, while Phil's name was not in his company name, GLOBE CONSULTING. Also Phil did a lot more things in his business that he was not proud of than his father did in his.

"I don't think that blacks are inferior and I don't dislike them, but I won't apologize for thinking about self defense. I have the right to protect my family and myself from anybody, black, white or whoever if I think they might try to hurt us", Phil told Vaughn this. He didn't go as far as Vaughn in his prejudices, but he did believe that blacks were more likely in some ways to threaten his family and in other ways whites were more threatening. Phil wasn't a bit shy in telling anyone who asked, that he would do his best "to let em have it", if they messed with his family - whoever they were.

"Women cause enough damage at home, I sure don't think that we can afford to have them in the workplace too", Vaughn's ideas were as usual 'just about off-the-wall' and Phil did not agree with him.

You can see everything traumatic that happens to you as a downer, or you can learn from each experience. You can find opportunity in the hardest times, by trying just a little harder and learning to do things a little smarter. That a way an economic recession or depression probably won't 'clean you out', instead you'll be Johnny on the spot when an opportunity to dig your way out and maybe get ahead comes along."

Like at GC, Phil was seeing that business conditions were changing dramatically and that he might get hurt if he continued doing his consulting. So he could feel depressed over the probable loss of this good paying job, or he could thank God that he was getting a little push to help him make the move.

Also he noticed a lot of great job possibilities that God had laid out in front of him. All of them were "cleaner ethically" and all had enough income potential to sustain them.

He would continue branching out into new fields of entrepreneurship. He had the consulting which he definitely wanted to phase out as soon as possible. He had two nice rental properties and hoped to get some more. He liked owning real estate, it was a "real" thing and come tough times, the equity in them would probably be worth more to his family than stocks, bonds or other assets that are represented by paper. Sure there was a company behind the stock or bond, but would it be around in 10 years and would it still be worth much. In the present recession, Phil knew that a lot of companies would go under and some of those might lose the pension funds of their elderly pensioners.

"Yeah, but none of us might be here in ten years anyway and even if you're here the mobs will take your house and money anyway", Sharon said.

Phil heard her but went on, "Yeah, I'll get into selling cruises and then package vacations and then finally make a million writing." That was what he really wanted to do most of all anyway. He loved having his own office too, it was like a headquarters and he sometimes imagined being Philip Marlowe from the Humphrey Bogart movies instead of Phil Glencoe, the kid from New Jersey. In his own office he could kick back and put his feet up on his desk or shadow box or exercise with the stereo on loud, or basically do whatever he wanted to do - this was to him one of the best benefits of being self employed. The worst part of it was that in his present consulting job, he was nothing but a con man.

He had to figure out ways of making money that didn't bother his conscience and he was thinking about it a lot. Finally another bright ideacop came to him.

That's what he'd do, he'd start a branch of GC in Japan and collect information on the Japanese market for his U.S. clients. In a way, he'd be like the trading companies, in that he'd collect information and also he'd be a sales agent for them. He'd just reverse the coin, he'd have an office in Japan that was supervised by an English speaker who knew how to speak Japanese and he'd have it staffed by Japanese. He'd use his U.S. office as a base for selling this service to U.S. companies. He knew what information the U.S. companies would need to crack Japanese markets and he'd get it for them at a price.

"Do you mind if I read more of your work", Sharon asked.

"We don't talk to each other enough and this way I'll know what on your mind", she laughed, "you should already know what's on my mind, because I tell you." She didn't think he'd make much money if any writing, but it was an interesting concept.

"I don't mind, go ahead and read anything, just take it all with a grain of salt", he was glad that she wanted to read it, this way they really would be able to communicate better. Sharon was right about her telling him what she really wanted and what she really thought, she was just a very verbally oriented person and he wasn't. So if they didn't do something to improve their communication they would never really understand much about each other.

Reading his short stories would be the ideal way to communicate with her and about her. He wasn't as effective putting thoughts and feelings into words as he would like to be, so whenever they got into a serious discussion or an argument, his tongue didn't always project what he really meant to say. The darn thing would just run off at the mouth and get him in trouble before he even knew what had happened. When he wrote things, he had more time to think them out, so his thoughts were more likely to come out right.

"If you need to keep scrunching up your face in order to feel all your parts working then do it", that was one thing Phil had figured out today while smoking. Nothing profound, not even remotely, but smoking helped him to feel the parts of his body moving and working like a machine. A not so well oiled machine at this time. As an out of shape 35 year old, he noticed a few kinks and catches in his joints. By exercising his face and learning how to hold his jaw, Phil thought he could breathe and hear better. Unfortunately he looked a little strange when he experimented with his body parts in public. Some folks get offended when they see kids doing this - much less an adult. Phil didn't care anymore, he was going to do what he wanted to and stop letting anyone make his decisions for him any more.

"Yeah, I'll even start using that big front molar to set my jaw so it will jut out like a movie star", Phil was thinking to himself more than a little in jest. Smoking pot usually made him "feel" more in touch with his body and he believed that he could tell that he could hear better and generally feel better when he jutted his lower jaw out as far as possible, like a full blown Hapsburg jaw.

Phil wondered sometimes about who he was as far as what his role in the everlasting theater of life and it was hard for him to know which member of the cast of characters he was. He really hoped that he could be a prophet of the good word and even a very minor one would be a great honor. He also hoped that he was not a prophet of evil and that if he were that he would be quickly struck down before he could do much damage.

"New Years resolution?", said Phil. "Yeah, I'm renewing the one I made last year and this time I hope to make it work!."

"I don't remember what your resolution was last year", Sharon said puzzled. "It was to be as real man for a change, and not let anyone run my life or censor me", he said proudly. "Oh God, give us all a break", Sharon groaned.

The party broke up at about 1:00 and Phil and Sharon went home. They spoke as the car maneuvered the wet streets.

"Melissa thinks Rhonda knows what she's talking about", said Sharon. "I'm surprised to hear that", Phil replied.

"Yeah, Rhonda's smart and and she even called herself aggressive" Sharon went on, "I like that in a lady, although personally, I prefer to just be assertive of my rights."

"Assertive, aggressive, what's the difference", said Phil.

"Either way, you all have the right to ruin a guys life with just one phone call to your lawyer."

"Don't start that", Sharon said. "I can't help it if your a wimp." She always chastised him when he started 'bitching and feeling sorry for himself'. It was New Years Eve and soon the champagne would be flowing.

"Well anyway", said Phil, "I wouldn't go along with any of what Rhonda had to say" back there. "Thats funny", Sharon teased, "you were nodding your head everytime she opened her mouth."

"Just humoring her", Phil replied.

"Look", said Sharon, "you know I hate the way you act when you smoke, I don't understand why you do it when you know how much I hate it. I wouldn't do anything like that if it bothered you so much!"

Phil considered for a few seconds and then spoke, "honey, why don't you tell me why you hate the way I act when I smoke and maybe I can change the way I act. That's going to work better than trying to get me to stop."

"you can get lung cancer and heart disease from smoking", Sharon reminded him. "Yeah, but I'm probably gonna get one of those anyway", he answered. With the way humans abused their bodies and the environment, he knew that something out there that humans had put into the environment - or his own excesses, would obviously do him in.

They had gotten into a full blown fight by the time the car pulled into their driveway. The smoking disagreement had a way of escalating like this.

"I don't know if this is going to be a divorce or our last real estate deal we pull off together", Phil told Sharon, when the conversation reached the point of divorce being mentioned again.

"Let's hope it's a profitable one", Sharon replied.

If they got divorced right now, Phil and Sharon were going to have to sell the still unfinished house that they were building. No one knew how this was going to proceed or what it's outcome would be. Their marriage was on the rocks again and the final outcome was uncertain.

He figured he'd just do the best he could if they actually split, but it didn't look real good. If they got into a court battle over there few possessions, things could get messy.

The trauma that a divorce would cause the children was Phil's greatest concern. Sharon had the exact same concern.

"The fruit of the tree of Knowledge, that must be pot or shrooms or something", Phil was thinking to himself, "darn, I hope that's not right", he said to himself.

For now on he would just tell Sharon, that he would absolutely have to have the right to make all of his own decisions. At least between the two of them, the government's laws were a different thing. He would try his hardest to obey all of the governments laws, however he knew that there were a couple he presently couldn't force himself to obey and didn't feel compelled to either.. These were moral laws, such as right to choose abortion and secondly the right to smoke what ever he wanted to.

Sharon had flipped out over him wanting to go smoke with his friends at the New Years Eve party. This was the cause of the fight, but it had greater ramifications. Phil wasn't sure, but he felt that their own little Atomic clock was ticking about as close to midnight as it ever had in the history of their little cold war" - all of their friends knew about Phil and Sharon's little war over him smoking and her emotional objections to it. For his part, Phil wanted to do as little of it as possible, but he was to be the judge of how much or how little of it he could do. He didn't want his wife telling how often he could smoke and he wasn't sure that he agreed that the government had a right to tell him that he couldn't do it at all.

It seemed like they were never going to come to terms with each other over this, they were miles apart in their beliefs about it and this might be the straw that would break the camels back in their already strained marriage. There was still however 'hope' and at least temporarily a happy ending.

Now it was Phil's turn to get tough, he turned slowly around towards Sharon and spoke.

"For now on I'm just going to do my best at home and at work and I'm going to be the judge of it what I'm doing is moral or ethical or anything else", his voice was not loud but his tone was terse. "For now I'll do exactly what I want to do and I won't say I'm sorry or appologize to anyone", he was talking in a tone of voice she wasn't used to - he was plain yelling at her. He wouldn't make this speech to his employees, but everything he said would apply to his relations with them to. He was going to be a tougher boss, but hopefully a better boss in lots of other ways too.

Saying all this to Sharon was a big relief to Phil and now he could see major benefits as he relaxed a little. The major benefit to him was that he didn't ever have to feel in a hurry or under pressure again. He would leave everything in God's hands now and just relax.

"You and I can live life together or apart, that's up to you at this point and it probably always will be, I don't plan on ever divorcing you over anything", she like this part, but not the next.

He felt like he was coming out of the closet of shame that society had tricked him into because he smoked grass.

Phil didn't expect Sharon to smoke with him, but he did expect her to stop getting on his case about it all the time.

"I absolutely won't be ruled by you or any other person or by any government on earth", Phil told Sharon, "for now on it's up to me how I live my life, God help me."

In a nutshell, he was now ready and willing to meet his maker.

"God help us all", said Sharon, "now we're really in for it."

He had stopped smoking almost completely seven years ago and he was trying to think about the changes in his life since then. He had since had one child, the other being born back in his wilder, freer days. He

was certainly wealthier now than he had been back then, but he wasn't sure that he was any healthier. In fact he was now sixty pounds heavier than the spry 165 pounds he'd been back then!

Phil loved her and always would, he'd always protect her too. He wasn't planning on getting mean with her, he was planning however on getting tough with her. If she wanted to keep sharing her life with him and him sharing his life with her, she would have to at least cool her jets. That way he could continue to be honest with her and not hide the things he was doing from her. His life was about to change and he hoped that she would come along for the ride.

"As far as I'm concerned, our wedding vows are stronger than any U.S. law, because I made that vow to you before God. I promised to be faithful and promised a few other things regarding our marriage. Those are the only promises that I plan on working like heck to keep."

She was an excellent wife except for the one point of contention regarding smoking. Sharon also could work and being an accountant she could make good money in case they ever needed it, this would be useful to the family with or without him. If Phil changed jobs to the travel agency business, she might truly have to go back to work in the near future.

"From now on, this is how it's going to be", he told her with authority. "As long as are married and living together, you won't question how I live my life. I'll do whatever I want and my only obligation is to do it responsibly and I mean responsibly in my opinion.", Sharon was stunned but relieved too.

"I will do whatever I want from now on, cause I know I can live without you now. Over this one little point of disagreement, you've made me sorry that we ever got married. If I can't be the boss between me and my wife, how can I ever be the master in other situations. As long as I don't recklessly kill someone or commit adultery, you'd better leave my conscience alone and worry about yourself or someone else"

"I'm going to try to be as considerate as possible of your and your feeling on the matter, but as far as when and where and everything else, it's purely up to me"

"I was a certain kind of person when we met", Said Phil, "I've tried being something else for eight years now and I don't like it so I'm going back to who I was - maybe I'll go seven years on seven years off for now on", he smirked.

He hated to think that they might split, but he was convinced that it was worth taking a stand now. If it came down to it and she threatened to divorce him, then sadly that is what was going to happen. He would not play second fiddle in their relationship anymore.

Getting divorced was one of the last things he wanted to do, but before it had been the last thing.

"I don't need a babysitter and for now on I won't let you mother me or whatever it is you're doing!"

"I'm not making any concessions either", he said indignantly, "that's just a way of getting the camels nose under the tent and then your demands will never end."

"It'll be a miracle if we save our marriage", Phil told Sharon. "I'm putting my foot down about what I want and for your part, you're as stubborn as can be", but I'm hoping for that miracle to happen.

"And one more thing, one more very important thing, don't expect me to make any more promises to you about anything.

Like I said, the only promises I've got to keep to you are the ones we made when we got married.

"Don't ask me to make you any promises and you won't have to worry about me telling you any lies."

"I'm not buying into your way of thinking and that's, that!

You'll either have to be with me or against me, because that's what I must have from you for now on", he told Sharon.

"For now on it'll be live for today and have a good time! You see, I'm glad that the end of the world is coming, because I think the change will do it good!"

"Great", said the preacher, "when your kids ask you what you do for a living, you can tell them you make toast and you're the toast!"

He looked at Phil with disdain, disgust and a few other emotions and spit on the ground, "that's the kind of old man you are to those kids, you're a joker and a loser."

His voice trailed off and Phil felt his bloodpressure rise. "Chill out", he heard the voice in his head tell him. It was his conscience talking to him.

"Life's a drag sometimes", Phil countered, "the whole world could use a joint, cause it's too damn uptight.

If the whole world had a peaceful attitude adjustment, things might improve", he said. His humble opinion was that the stuff was made by God, not by the devil and God made it as one of the first and best stress relievers.

As far as his wanting for him and Joey to learn karate, he thought that it was none of the preachers opinion. "As long as their are Neandrathal's out there, I'll learn it, you're welcome not to."

Phil made another stupid insensitive remark to Sharon on the Phone and then hung up, oh it felt good to be one of the ugly, repressive, subhuman dominant white males, he thought sarcastically.

"This is only the beginning", Phil told Sharon and Joey. Sally heard too, but at three years old, she was too young to understand the idea he was trying to convey. Sharon and Joey also didn't understand exactly, they both interpreted the sentence differently.

"It's easy to make lots of money", Vaughn told Phil, "it's just how you do it that is important". Phil looked at his friend and remarked sharply, "you scoundrel, you'll take it anyway you can get it". "Thanks, but I really deserve that", Vaughn replied sarcastically.

Their conversation continued, each man trying to make a case for himself to justify his lifestyle. "I like to be alone", Phil said.

Vaughn, ever the social climber knew this and had razed Phil about it before. "Why would you want to be alone."

"Guess it's because I cut myself more slack than anyone else does."

He often felt like a puppet on a string, orchestrated by family, friends, co-workers or complete strangers. It seemed to him, that every stubbed toe and cut finger had someone else's name on it. They came courtesy of someone who was pressuring him to rush through some task, in order to make their life easier or their control over him more complete.

This was not only the beginning of a new way of doing things for him, it was also the end of the old ways. He had somehow turned out that, but he would quickly change, he would not "hop to it" anymore. He had allowed himself to be bullied by too many people. They had told him what to do and he had jumped to it and then also had to give an accounting of everything he did.

"Then divorce me", Phil told Sharon courteously. Her Bible had all kinds of passages about submissiveness, which of course she just paid lip service to. The one or two possible references to smoke however gave her endless ammunition for her harping. The next to last thing that he wanted, was to get divorced. The last thing that he wanted was to be made miserable for the rest of his life.

Tucking in your shirt was a sign of submission in Phil's opinion. He noticed that like him, Joey didn't like to do it. Sharon on the other hand always the perfect citizen, required it of both of them. He was Donald, she was Daisy. Likewise, Joey was Micky and Sally was Minnie in this household that was like a cross between the TV show honeymooners, the Bundy's, the Simpson's and the family in the video "McGee and Me."

He changed stations on the FM stereo radio, "I know `she's got legs'", he said in response to the title of the next song on the station that he had just left. He was looking for a station with something a little heavier to feed his head with, it wasn't available on any of the stations he tried, so he went back to the legs song.

Jack sometimes razed Phil about how he made his money. "You must feel terrible selling the Japanese market information", he said, "especially in light of how they're ruining our economy."

Phil was used to it by now, he had gotten into it somewhat by accident, with the early arrival of his first child. "Yeah, I'd still be doing something respectable like my old bartending job, if I hadn't gotten caught up in this bullshits." His voice had a rare sense of irony to it. Besides, he didn't think the Japanese were as much our problem as we were, he wouldn't be surprised if they got blamed for the Michelangelo computer virus before it was all over. He pushed a few more buttons and saved his computer file, just in case.

There were a lot of things that Phil wanted to teach the kids before it was too late. Mind your own business as much as possible and keep your nose clean, were two important ones. Drive right smack in the middle of your lane was another thing he'd tried to teach the kids. Always wear a seatbelt, keep your headrest up and use all of life's safety equipment diligently. Look both ways twice especially immediately before you enter the crash zone of the street or whatever. Make sure that you do it while you're still enough distance from that fatal zone to still stop or change direction.

The two men left the office and both loaded into Phil's car for the trip to the hamburger joint. Phil liked Jack and vice-versa, both saw the other as on the ball. For his part, Phil was so used to dealing with morons all day long, that he took such people for granted by now. It seemed that those that weren't morons, were often busybodies or mini-tyrants in one way or another. It was a rare individual who was both a nice guy and on the ball and he appreciated this in a few of his friends.

Their lunch confirmed this. At the fast food place, he didn't get his mayonaise as usual. Were these employees under strict instructions not to give drive-thru customers condiments or were they just all stupid. As they drove back to the office, Phil glanced at the other drivers that he passed. The number of completely frazzled women that he passed every day amazed him. They tapped their hands nervously as they waited in the drive-thru line, they drove at least as nutty as most men and the scowls on their faces could sink a ship. If men went around with such looks on their faces, they'd be taken away in straight jackets. Had it always been this way, or were women just more stressed out in these "later" days.

A rock and roll "hymn #43" was on the car radio and it was right on. "If Jesus saves, he'd better save himself", it went on to say something like from the glory money seekers that would use his name in vain.

One treat he remembered receiving occasionally as a kid, were cigar boxes. These big colorful secure boxes were great and Phil and his siblings had vied with each other to get one when the friendly lawyer brought them over.

As far as teaching them much more, he felt it was not his duty. His duty instead was to help get them started and let them learn how to learn the things they'd need to know. He couldn't and shouldn't impart too much to them, since this robs them of the chance to face challenges themselves and learn things their own way.

Phil kept the FM doorbell chimer in his chest pocket all the time when he was at the office. It alerted him of a guest at the door regardless of where he was in the building or grounds and it gave his heart a jumpstart when it's loud chime went off.

Phil's mind was wandering as he shampooed the office carpet. "Men have probably always smoked", he thought. He pictured Native Americans sitting around the fire smoking their peace pipes, in the background he pictured Indian women sitting and talking to each other.

In the same picture there might be white frontiersmen or calvary officers smoking with them. Smoking seemed to be as universal among men as talking was among women.

That made him start thinking about what Sharon had said about the only friends he had being smoking friends. It ocured to him that this was normal after all and didn't make him a freak and a looser as she made it out to mean. He was no longer sorry that he didn't hang around with the guys that she was always trying to route him to for friends.

Phil thought that one thing that got to her was that recently he could do whatever he wanted to all day long, this because he now had employees doing the phone work for him. This opened up his day so that he had more free time.

Jack asked Phil if he had anymore. "No I don't", said Phil, "not unless you want to smoke tar."

Later at the house Phil and Sharon got into it again. The usual thing about him not having a grip on life and not being stable enough to insure her and the kids the steadily increasing standard of living. She at least wanted to have enough security to feel that she would not unduly loose what they already had.

For his part Phil would love to give her an increasingly better standard of living, but he was determined to do it his way. If he were to work his fingers to the bone, it would have to be at something he enjoyed and that meant not at consulting. If she had to go to work to help herself maintain that feeling of security, then so be it.

In the playground of his mind, Phil fancied Joey as the keeper of the hearth and himself as the keeper of the carpet runners. Little Sally hadn't set out on a career yet, but like Joey, she had the ability to do just about anything. One of the few things in life that was still important to Phil was to be as honest as possible with Joey and Sally. He wasn't going to change -this for Sharon or anyone. As usual Phil saw this as an issue between he and Sharon. He didn't want for their marriage to be a fight and he didn't want either of them to feel like a captive.

"I don't want to put my cards in another persons hand to play, they'll just use them to their advantage not mine, it's human nature", Phil said.

"Is that why you're in business for yourself?", Jack asked a little enviously.

"Heck yeah", Phil replied excitedly, "I want to be in control of my limited skills and intelligence, that's the only way they'll work their best for me and my family."

He basically felt great, he felt that he was now free and could now do as he pleased from morning till the end of the day. He had decided that he wasn't going to be a "good German" for any man or point of view on earth.

Phil felt like instead of making concessions, he had over the last eight years, just "given away the farm", to Sharon. Now in retrospect, he believed that there was never any reason for concessions, much less a complete surrender of his will to her.

He didn't want it to be "for want of the price of tea and a slice", that old folks die, but he also didn't want them running his life.

That's why the eskimos came to mind, since they left their old out on the ice flows to die when they became a burden. Well meddlers fit into the same catagory in his book and they'd better realize that just as we owe them certain things, they owe us the same.

The incident at the consumer electronics store came back to him.

As he had stood in the line, an old man was buying a police scanner. Some old people apparently spend a lot of time listening to the scanner to fight boredom or whatever. The salesman demonstrated the scanner to the old gentlemen and across the wavelengths came the voice of an old woman. She was calling 911 to report two teenagers under a bridge, which she must have believed to be "suspicious" activity. Great, the police are getting surveillance reports from the little old ladies in tennis shoes crowd.

This was it Phil decided, he had been planning this for days and he knew that this would be the best chance to kill Vaughn that he would have. Since Vaughn had come over while he was shampooing the carpet, Phil would have the ways and means to clean up any traces of blood.

Phil straightened the tip of the note stabber with his plier and prepared to commit the dirty deed. Vaughn walked into the room and continued with tirade against Phil, lambasting him for everything that he'd done in the last ten years.

Phil knew he had to act now, to rid himself of this friend gone bad. He knew that Vaughn knew everything that he'd done regarding the smuggling operation and could this information could put Phil in the slammer for the rest of his life.

"I'm going to get a cup of coffee, do you want one", Phil said lightly, but treacherously to his old confidant. "No I don't want any damn coffee", Vaughn replied angrily.

As Phil left the room, he paused behind Vaughn's chair considering if this was the time to do it. Then he continued into the middle office and filled his cup. He came back behind Vaughn and this time decided to do it!

With a loud yell, Phil grabbed poor Vaughn by the neck and thrust the note stunner into the stunned man's ear. Vaughn tried to yell, but Phil was ready for this and now cupped his hand firmly over his agonizing victim's mouth. Phil drove the thin six inch spike deep into his old buddy's brain and wallowed it around. For several seconds, Vaughn put up a struggle, but the struggle was to no avail and it soon became a spastic death dance. The big man collapsed to the floor and his body twitched wretchedly as the last ounces of strength he had were converted into involuntary contortions.

Phil wasted no time, the first thing he did was to bend the tip of the stunner back to its original angle. The makers of these things no longer made them with the sharp point up and Phil wanted to remove it from consideration as an obvious murder weapon. He didn't know if the police would ever investigate him as a suspect, but just in case, he didn't want to forget anything. Now he came to the job of disposing of Vaughn's body.

Despite all of Sharon's namecalling and the snide opinions of the men in high places and the ladies in tennis shoes, Phil was not going to back down. He felt like he was on the right path and that he wasn't going to tow the line per the instructions of any of the aforementioned. Even though they all evoked God and Jesus to help them do their will, Phil thought that the power this group received was from something other than God and good.

"Wipe that silly smirk off your face", the robed Judge yelled at him. Phil's mind had drifted off for a couple of moments and the judge did not like that or Phil's looks for that matter. Phil was different looking and just being himself evoked looks from the gapers and rubber neckers crowd. The judge's comments took him back to sometime around first grade, back when his teachers had repeatedly said the same thing. To them he was the same strange boy that this judge saw but didn't understand or like.

Phil erupted, "look I'm just in favor of not getting screwed for smoking herb, I'm not speaking on behalf of crackheads and coke heads let them speak up for themselves if they want to!"

The judge interrupted him, "sit down you bum, why you don't even tuck in your shirt - you're a slob". The judge had hit on one of Phil's sore spots, he saw tucking in his shirt as a form of submission. Lately, he never tucked it in except at business meetings with the Japanese.

What it boiled down to between him and Sharon was her claim of moral superiority. She never would come out and say it, but she alluded to it frequently. Phil for his part thought it was bogus for her and her Christian buddies to feel morally superior to subhumans like him. Maybe they were "better off" than the crowd he hung out with, but not better.

"I'd like to give you some advice", the judge said to Phil. "Change the path you're on before it's too late!", his tone was very stern.

"Yes thank you and now I'd like to give you some advice", Phil to the judge. The robbed rogue looked at Phil disgustedly and started to speak, but Phil interrupted him.

"My advice to you is to take your advice and stick it where the sun don't shine!", even before Phil completed his sentence an uproar commenced. From the bailiff and others came cries of "contempt of court" and Phil was surrounded by Sheriffs deputies. He was trying to continue his speech and they proceeded to force him onto the floor. "I'll grant you one thing", Phil said as he struggled, "big brother's gotten damn good at keeping an eye on little guys like me!"

"Contemp of court, contempt of court", the judge shouted, "Take him away, take him away." The guards pounded Phil as they dragged him down the corridor towards the jail.

"It's time to even it up, to even it up, time for the ultimate liberation", Phil shouted as he was dragged away. "Men's liberation, womens liberation, everyone's liberation, you're free! free!" His voice faded into the stillness of the night.

The honest televangelists are true modern day heroes, but they're not the only ones spreading the word about the end of the age. So are rock singers like Jim Morrison who spread the word in songs like blood in the street in the the streets of Chicago. The main difference is that they are also giving good advice about what to do to get ready for it.

"Women are not as open minded as men, or something, that's why they haven't till now provided humankind with any religious revelations." Vaughn had told Phil this on that same fateful day that his life had been snuffed. Now Phil would have to bear up under the guilty verdict that the mostly female jury had arrived at for him. He felt that if he'd had more men on the jury he might have been set free. "Those women should be working on quilting not on finding me guilty", he thought. He was remorsefull now, but only because of the impending punishment, not because of the murder. He still tried to rationalize the whole thing so that he came out the victim and not Vaughn.

"Bite your lip", the judge told Phil. "Bite your own retorted
"How old do you want the kids to be when they find out", Sharon asked. "I hope that they're old enough to understand, but that's largely beyond my control". He still thought that being honest with them was the best thing to do. Sharon contrary to her nature wanted him to deny it as long as possible, but he didn't see the necessity. He wanted to be truthful to his children as much as he possibly could be and in his mind he thought that this was no exception. He hoped that Joey would figure it out on his own and then just guess out loud one day. If that happened, Phil would just say well you guessed it.

Phil's "criminal" mind whirled around, always probing for a new opportunity a new opening to exploit the world around him. Now he sat at the desk and tried to figure out where a good place to hide the bong would be. Finally after trying to move the computer to a higher shelf on the hutch and failing, he found the perfect hiding place. It was just on the side of the monitor in an ideal spot. Here it would be hidden from all but the most curious eyes.

"She thinks I'm Satan", Phil said about Sharon.

"I'm sorry the office is a mess", Phil told the little old lady. She had come in off the street to look at cruise literature and Phil was caught with his office a tad messier than usual.

"Oh, what a nice office", the kind, grandmotherly looking woman replied, "it's not messy at all."

"It's not messy at all", Phil mocked her. By now he was completely deranged and didn't care what he said to anyone.exi

His office was his digs, he liked to hang out there. It was the place where, what he said went, dig.

His employees thought that Phil was a scoundrel and that his consulting business was unethical if not immoral. Since they believed this, it was easy for them to rip him off and justify it to themselves. Just the same, he justified ripping off the Japanese, who in turn justified ripping off the Americans and around and around it all went.

Some people are extremely efficient in their work, some are not, so why was he being penalized for the shortcomings of those others Phil thought as he considered quitting his job. "It's like Michael Jordan having to put up with some misfit like me on the Chicago Bulls, it's not fair", thought Phil. "Different people had various physical, mental and character strengths and weaknesses", said the old man and for now you'll have to bear with these people".(per the outline, add this to the beginning of Diary of a Mad Smuggler).

Sharon was convinced that Phil was such a subhuman bastard, that even his children must be half devil. "I can save the kids, but not you", she accused him, "but you're too far gone, I'm turning your ass in!".

"I gave you my heart, but you wanted my soul", Phil replied cryptically. She believed she could save these children even though she thought them to be half devilish, because they shared Phil's "corrupt" blood. Such was her attitude of self-righteousness, that she thought her own purity was enough to do the trick.

Things had gotten so bad at the office, that Phil was down to saving paperclips that came on letter in the mail. He had always thought it humorous when he had heard of people doing this and now here he was, one of them. It wasn't only paperclips, it was also odd screws, nails, old phone and electrical parts, but this was nothing new.

He thought the pastors should remember the scripture, "love your enemy", in dealing with the occultist and blasphemous rock and rollers. As for those two groups, he hoped they would chill out, re-evaluate things and see the light.

Both should consider that they may have more in common with each other than they think. In fact they are all brothers and should treat each other better in the future than they have in the past.

Phil was the first one Vaughn had ever known who smoked through his nose instead of through his mouth. It worked great with the one hitter, since he could put the thing right up to his nose and the opening wasn't too big. He had tried the same thing with the bong, but he couldn't draw on it nearly hard enough to get a hit. It wasn't as gross as it sounded, because the thing didn't even have to actually come into contact with his nose. It was kind of like taking a nose hit with a joint except this way you got a smaller hit. The advantage was that it seemed to save a little wear and tear on his throat and was a more economical way to smoke. Phil rarely used this method, but it came in handy especially when his throat was on the verge of getting sore.

Phil gave Joey a little speech about the responsibilities the boy would have, if he became a black belt in Karate. "It's a little like you're a relatively nice gentle dog like a golden retriever and you've been changed into a doberman or a pit bull. You've got to keep that new dog under control or it will be picked up by the animal control people and put to sleep. If you're a blackbelt, you've got to keep your hands and feet under control at all times. If you hurt someone, irresponsibly, you'll be put in the big house or worse."

"For three strange days", the singer talks about having no obligations, he couldn't put a smile upon his face, so he pulled up a chair and began drinking by himself.

Sometimes it takes all day to make toast", said Phil, "that's why I come home a little light headed, I've been working all day to see the wall move and finally gotten it just when it's time to come home".

"I didn't try to teach you anything and I don't care if you got anything out of the job", said Phil sarcastically, "I just wanted to exploit you as cheap labor!"

"If it's true that some people that have never heard the name of Jesus may go to Heaven, because of their inherent belief in God and because of their good lives, isn't it logical that a lot of people that act religious won't go to Heaven like they keep bragging they know they will", Phil questioned Vaughn.

"You're a disgrace to the human race!", Vaughn replied. He was a former great athlete and he could be intimidating, and this was one of those times. "You're just making a lot of noise as usual", he told Phil, "but you'll pay for it I guarantee it!"

"Yeah, I know", said Phil, "I'll get it one way or the other that's for sure".

"The testicles and ovaries are the essence of humankind, as much as his brain is and more than his heart is", said Vaughn.

"I want us to have a good relationship too", Phil said to Joey, "heck, I want us to have a great relationship, I just want how we relate to be decided by you and me, not by the scouts or the church or anyone else".

They had gotten into an argument over Phil losing his temper and swearing as he tried to collect the two children and get out the office door. It was harder than one would think, since Joey was busy making miniature love letters with the paper cutter and glue and Sally was busy with the Air Mail stamper.

Phil went on, "I agree that church and scouts are good, but we need to be in charge of our lives and our free time, not them."

NEXT MORNING

Phil dropped Joey off at school and drove to work. He made coffee and then called Jack, to see if his "stuff" was ready.

"No, it's not here yet", said Jack, "I think I'll have it this afternoon at the earliest." Their conversation was short, as both men had work to do.

Phil cleaned the cigarette with a large straightened out paper clip and saved the resin by scraping it into a plastic first class stamp container. He was getting quite a little ball of resin by now and figured that it was about a two or three day supply - if he needed it.

"Funny", he thought to himself, "I've heard of collecting balls of string, but never balls of this stuff."

Wandering into the middle office, he set the camcorder and VCR up so that he could download the 8mm camcorder tape onto the standard VHS tape. The first segment on the 8mm tape was the Christmas tape from three months ago. He wasn't sure if they had that one on VHS tape, so he decided to copy it just in

case. He could imagine Sharon's response if they already had it on tape, "you're just wasting tape, we don't need that", she would say.

He had recently heard however that video tape only last's for up to 15 years, unlike audio tape which can last 50 years or more. After hearing that, he decided that it wouldn't hurt to have more than one recording of some family tapes. Especially if he used better quality tape and a slower recording speed, like he was doing now. He wanted those tapes to be around in fifty years if possible and with the way VCR'S eat tapes and the way they fade away, the only way to preserve them was to have two good copies.

As far as Phil was concerned, Joey's new nickname should be bulldog.

Bull had been Joey's unofficial nickname since he was about three and now that they'd moved to a town that had a bulldog as it's mascot, it would be appropriate to change his nickname to bulldog. He certainly was as tenacious as a bulldog and he seemed to have inherited his physique from his mom's side of the family, which meant he was as strong as a bull.

Joey was learning to be Phil's office boy and he gradually becoming familiar with all of the office machines. This included copiers, typewriters, computer, VCR and video tape player.

Phil was instructing Joey on how to operate the VCR and VTP in tandem to download tapes. "When you see those two arrows pointing to the left, that means you're rewinding, when you see the white square, it means stop, when you see the big arrow pointing to the right lit up, it means you're recording."

Joey was absorbing everything that Phil said, Sally was listening some too. "Those are called universal symbols", Phil tutored. "There are lots of universal symbols, stop signs, yield signs and most famous the cross." The problem was that symbols could be misread with catastrophic results.

For his part, Phil didn't want to be undully influenced by the, "sky is falling", crowd, or by the "cut the end of the ham off, because mother did", crowd.

"You're wasted!", said Vaughn, "you've come to Bible study wasted!"

It was Phil's first meeting with the group, but so he had wanted to make a more favorable impression. Phil limped into the room favoring his right foot and plopped down on the couch. His foot had fallen asleep as we waited at the front door and he looked like a drunk as he staggered into the house.

The Old Man's hair was white as snow, which was appropriate since he was older than time itself. Other than the white hair, he showed no other signs of age, in fact he had selected white as his hair color anyway.

THIS is how you make an "F", said Phil. Joey looked at the way Phil darkened the letters. "If you're being graded for penmanship, take your time and make the letters light first and then darken them with your pen or pencil."

"I know that already", Joey replied. It was one of his most frequent responses.

Phil got light, "what you do with this knowledge, is up to you, you can use it all the time or none of the time."

"Dad", you're crazy!", Joey laughingly replied.

The nature of the mistakes he made typing on the computer seemed different than those he made when writing long hand. Longhand errors were simply mishaped letters caused by his hurried writing, which sometimes happened in the car. With the computer on the other hand, his mistakes were caused by him hitting a wrong key. This created more Freudian slips. They came in different types, some only memorable in their own specific context. Sometimes errors were the use of upper case at the wrong time or letter substitutions that spelled unintended words that related to the content of the writing. Another thing he noticed on the computer, was that when tried to work "big" words for the first time, he messed up a lot. This happened when he tried to type the word frequent for the first time and it had come out "freugent." Although not a Freudian slip error, it was common of the other major type of error he made. A Freudian slip was for example when he typed tough, when he meant to type touch and maybe when he typed next instead of neck. However, once he typed a "big" word a couple of times, it's typing "path", remained in memory indefinitely.

The memory patterns that he was establishing between his fingers and head for typing were improving, but he still stuttered with his fingers as much as he did with his lips.

The phone rang and it was Sharon, she was making one of her mid-day calls, to see what Phil had gotten done so far that day. She believed that he was wasted all the time at work and felt compelled to monitor on him periodically. He didn't really mind, it seemed to be another way to keep the lines of communication open between them, per the marriage counselors advice. He didn't feel like he just came to work to make toast of himself, but that was her opinion.

Phil was never one to be interested in details. Even with amounts of money, he was only interested in gross amounts, not exact amounts.

Phil prayed that there would be a literal rapture of Christians, since that would probably save his wife and kids from having to suffer on earth during the prophesized horrible tribulation period. As for himself, he just prayed that he would qualify for the big airlift.

A couple of the most important words, are clearance and tolerance.

In machinery, this is what makes them tick. For people, clearance means the difference between a scraped, bloody knuckle and a job well done. Or it means the difference between a blocked artery and a heart attack or good health. Tolerance in human relations means the difference between war and peace.

To Sharon's dismay, both Joey and Phil liked some of the same songs, including Ugly Boy Joe's, "I hate everything about you." Neither of them meant anything personal by their liking of the song, it was basically the beat and the rebelousness of the song. They were both rebels without a clue and they related to the song's message, which at least Phil interpreted as being, standing up against authority and the establishment.

"Elbow room room, give me some space to breath!", Joey said, whirling his elbows around like an NBA center who had just snatched a critical rebound. Joey had seen his dad do the same thing to him a few days ago and now he was perpetuating the outburst. Phil had not actually elbowed Joey or Sally who had also been there, but he did mean it when he told them to give him a a tiny bit of space.

As much as he loved the children, he was a little tired of practically tripping over them everytime he turned around. He did however love the personal contact and hugs they gave him, so he didn't want to discourage closeness. He just wanted them to realize that he had much longer arms than them and needed a little more "personal space."

Snappy the dog on the other hand was a lot worse than the kids. He was always underfoot and Phil was trying to break the Boston Terrier of doing it. He basically gave the dog a little bit of his shoe in the behind to teach it. Phil observed that his dogs had to learn from experience and negative reinforcement at times, because they didn't speak English.

Their big yard dog, Sparky, was a good example of being smart enough to learn from experience. She was three years old now and knew a few things, including what "lookout!" means. Phil had taught her this by saying it before he threw things in her direction. Such was the case when he through firewood over the fence in her direction, when unloading the trunk. It hadn't taken her long to understand what lookout means and she would boogy out of harms way. Snoopy was only nine months old and he still didn't have the word's meaning deeply ingrained in his canine memory yet.

"We go around doing people favors in order to make them feel obligated to us", said Vaughn.

"Yeah and 90% of life is just showing up", replied Phil disjointedly.

"That might be true, but it's the other 10% that really counts", countered Vaughn.

"I'd also like to think that there's a "rest of the story" to what Jesus say's in the Bible and that it's not all the Dante's inferno business that the King James is all about".

"Dream on", Vaughn told Phil.

Phil blew up at the visa card lady on the other end of the phone. She had not returned his calls for two weeks and now she was telling him that they had rejected his application for a merchant number.

He told her that they were on the verge of landing a very large group cruise account and that her bank had now left him unable to service these clients. He really let her have it, kind of like he had heard his father dress down an employee one time, but not quite that bad.

"Boy, I'll bet that made her day", Phil thought to himself as he hung up the phone and chuckled.

"I just can't believe that God would send so many people to hell", said Phil, "it just seems too incredibly terrible."

Vaughn looked up from his plate of pie and remarked in an off-hand way, "God's not in a popularity contest, he's got the universe to run."

Phil walked over to the closet and opened the sliding door, as he did so, he heard a loud ripppppp!... sound on the radio commercial. It was a the sound of a record player needle scratching all the way across a record. Immediately he forgot what he had walked to the closet for, as his mind focused itself on the radio's sound.

"That's it", he thought as he stood there temporarily blanking out on what he wanted from the closet, "that's the sound my brain disengaging." A second later, he remembered what he had needed from the closet and he picked up the IRS circular E booklet. "I wish my brain wasn't stuck in "park" so much." He was comparing his induced memory lapses with a car stuck in park or a computer with it's hard drive stuck in park.

Little did he know that this would be the same ironic moment that his computer would choose to permanently park it's hard drive and lose all of his valuable computer memory files forever. This wasn't one of the mini-crashes that it had in the past, this was the big one and all of his data was lost forever. (This could be the place where he decides to go 'BAD' , since all his letters and company data was lost forever, since he hadn't backed up his fickle hard drive.

"Where's Sharon going", asked Jack. "I don't know", Phil replied sarcastically, "I don't look a gift horse in the mouth." He was forever the scoundrel.

Jack left and the old man promptly appeared in Phil's mind. "I'm going to show you the only two stretches you'll ever need to do, to stay in good shape."

Phil was not in the mood to concentrate on listening, but he couldn't leave.

The old man got down on the floor and proceeded to reach out and touch his toes. He did it a lot easier than Phil ever could, since the old man's body was in much better shape than Phil's. He had the body of a mature, fit 30 year old. By contrast, Phil at the age of 40 had the body of a sixty year old. The old man's face on the other hand was hard to date. Using carbon dating it would go back eons, but based on the conditions of his features and the relative lack of features, he looked like a prematurely white haired forty year old.

The old man went on, "now rock back until your on your back, simple right?"

"Yeah, right", Phil said to himself.

"The second stretching exercise is to just do the opposite of that one!", he arched one of his high eyebrows to emphasize his point.

Phil shrugged, feeling like Nicolo in McGee and Me after his cartoon character friend had given him some sage advice.

As far as your wife", the old man said, "just remember that men and women are both creatures of habit, but their habits are very different.

This was handy advice, since at that moment, Sharon burst into the office. "What's wrong with you!", she said, "have you lost your stupid mind!" She was referring to something he'd done wrong, which meant most any recent action on his part.

"Haven't lost my mind", he responded matter-of-factly, "just goin back to my wild roots". Phil slicked his "Wildrooted", hair back a couple of times with his comb and kept his feet up on the table.

The old man's hair was thick wavy and white, but Phil didn't know if he used anything on it.

Phil decided to leave the expensive smoke at home and not take it with him on his trip to New York and New Jersey. He knew that if he took it, he would smoke twice as much as he did at home, because he'd have the option of smoking in the evening as well as the day. It was also good to take a few days off from smoking once in a while and this was a good opportunity. Two fringe benefits that came to mind were, he would not be transporting the controlled substance and he would be giving his lungs a four day breather. Relating to his father and sister would also be easier, since he would be straight the whole time he was with them.

"The Pharasee's have a second chance", said the old man, "the question is will they come along this time or not?" This was one of those comments made by the old man that Phil did not understand. "People need to learn to believe in miracles", the old guy went on. "Just like cancer, it can be cured miraculously, but it's better to take better care of your body in the first place so that it won't be racked with so many kinds of cancer and potential cancer".

Every action we take has an equal reaction and we need to be careful in how we live, so that the reaction is not opposite or negative.

"If they'd stop being lawyers and credit police, they'd be much better off". Phil was listening and starting to get a little of the "gist" of what the old guy meant.

"It's not that I want to shortchange you by not re-hiring you for this next job", Phil tried to explain to the employee, "it's just if I spend money on your labor, I can't spend money on the things my family needs".

Phil was starting to call his stretching Yoga now, this despite protests from the right wing of the world.

Phil didn't want to be a yogi, he just wanted to be a pinball wizard.

List of things that are fun to do straight:

list of things that are fun to do un-straight

Phil smothered the cigarette pipe with his finger, moving it continuously so it would not burn.

"Are you a smoker?", the employee asked.

"Yes" replied Phil matter-of-factly. He had hoped that the man wouldn't smell the smoke, since he had the airconditioner on and it filtered the air a little bit.

"What do you smoke, cigarettes or cigars?", his question was logical since he had walked into the room and knew he smelled something, but he wasn't sure what.

"I smoke cigarettes, cigars and pipes", Phil answered coolly, he had been expecting the question.

"What kind do you, smoke", the employee went on, "I only ask because it smells kind of different."

"I don't remember what this stuff is exactly, but I smoke a little of everything".

"What do you do with your spare time at work", Sharon asked him. She knew that now that Phil had employees, he must have a lot of spare time and she wanted to make sure he was using it productively.

Man does not live by bread alone, Phil said. He didn't bother explaining to Sharon what he meant, but she already had some idea.

He then layed down on the office floor and did some yoga. He assumed what he considered, a variation of the lion position. He liked this position for getting the kinks out of his body before a game of tennis. It was also good for relieving the pains in his sore neck and shoulder.

Sharon watched in disgust as he stuck his tongue out as far as he could. She thought he was being rude, but he was actually doing it for another reason. It turned out that like the old man had told him, this was a key yoga position and by sticking out his tongue as far as he could, it made it possible for him to flatten out more, achieve a better stretch and even pop his ears open.

mandalin wind, Rod Stewart

The coldest nights I'd ever know, but the mandalin wind couldn't change yuo
the coldest winter in almost 14 years, I couldn't believe you kept a smile. Now I can rest assured knowing
that we've seen the worst and I know I love you. I never was good with romantic words so the next few
lines come really hard. I dont have much but what I have is your's, except of course my steel guitar.
Cause I know you don't play, but I'll teach you some day because I love you.

I recall the night we knelt and prayed, noticing your face was thin and pale, I found it hared to hide mey
tears, I felt ashamed, I felt i'd let you down. No mandalin wind coud change a thing, change a thing. No
NO.

Nah, nah nah na, dah, dah ,da , dah.

Coldest Winter in almost 14 yrs, you never , never changed your mind, yeah , oh, ho and I love you yes
indeed, I love you, whoo, whoo, and I love youi.

Eric Clapton

Are you going to help , me or will you let me down, I'm lookinf gor that good live, will you let me down.
Will we cryin passion or will we cry in pain. Will our lonely teardrops fill the world with rain.

Help me up don't you let me down, I'm going to wake up in lheaven , not the cold cold ground.

Cant you hear the lovers crying in the night, they spend their whole lives trying and still can't get it right.

I dont know where we're going, but I guess we'll start. And just to show that I mean it, baby here's my
heart.

Help me up, don't let me down. I'm going to wake up in heaven, not the cold , cold ground.

Livin on my feelings.... baby once you touch it you'll never let it go.

So are you going to help me or will you let me down. I'm looking for the true love , am I lost or found.
And will we cry in passion, or will we cry in pain and will our lonely teardrops fill the world with rain.

Help me up don't you let me down, I'm going to wake up in lheaven , not the cold cold ground.

Help me up don't you let me down, I'm going to wake up in lheaven , not the cold cold ground.

"He just doesn't have a conscience", said Sharon and then she supported her opinon with examples from
their family life.

The ex employee who was testifying against him echoed her sentiments.

"He absolutely has no conscience, ethics or scruples", he said very seriously and he also backed up his opinion with a number of examples that had occurred during his tenure at the company.

The judge was profoundly moved by the testimony that was before him. "You are indeed a traitor and a beast!", he yelled. "If it were up to me, I'd have you drawn and quartered, for the crimes that you've committed against your fellow citizens and your wife and children!"

Phil was scared, but tried not to show it, "the only crime I've committed is that I have followed my own conscience instead of you all's." They all looked at him like he was some kind of horrid monster as he continued, "all of you are just as two faced as I am, if not more so!"

"Your mind is for rent and so is mine", the judge said, "and you've rented it to the devil!"

Phil writhed in his seat at the insult, "I'd kill you for saying that except this is supposed to be a free country so you're entitled to your opinion and I'll respect it. It's too bad you won't respect my opinions about God or government or what I want to stuff in my pipe."

"You've hurt a lot of people by your actions" was the judge's canned reply.

"That's bullshit", said Phil. "Contempt of court!", the judge yelled for the second time that day.

"No one will ever live forever on earth, not even with cloning and downloading, so why don't we start living with the knowledge that we're mere humans and stop taking life so seriously". Phil was sitting in a parking lot, to listen to the end of a song that he'd been wanting to hear all day. It was funny how the best songs came on just when he was ready to get out of the car, but he'd would foil entropy by staying in his car even if it made him a little late.

"The only everlasting life must be extra-human in nature."

His companions in the parking lots, were usually, elderly people left in cars and dogs and cats.

Phil closed the door to his office and turned on the vacuum cleaner, this would be a good way to get the door closed and locked so that he could smoke he said to himself.

"More than anything else, Heaven is a place where no one ever kills anyone else and no one ever has to tell a lie", the old man said to Phil. He had already described it as a place without locks and keys, since these were also unnecessary there. Other naturals such as no disease or misery were things that he didn't have to mention.

The old man now assumed the second yoga position that he used when doing his stretching exercises. Phil didn't think there was anything particularly spiritual about the yoga positions, but he also didn't believe Sharon's interpretation that by doing it, he was opening his mind up to demonic forces.

"Try it", the old guy said to Phil. Phil believed that the old man was not real, he considered it only a figment of his imagination that served as a character to write about. He figured that if Sharon knew about it, she would also see the old man as diabolically inspired and she would cite evidence from her cast of Christian leaders to support her belief.

Phil layed down on his back and stretched according to the old man's example. He stuck his feet up in the air, straightened his legs and held on firmly to each foot with his hands. It was quite different from

just touching his toes and he found that it helped get his body limbered and unkinked, regardless which way the "pressure lies."

He couldn't do it with his legs completely straight yet, but he was getting more limber all the time and eventually might be able to.

For the time being he stretched as far as he could and pushed himself to go a little farther. He would hold onto the toes of his socks or other items of clothing in order to get a little stretch out of the material to help him stretch a little farther. He also used desks, tables, door frames and even carpets to help him stretch to the position he was trying for.

Phil was to the point where he would do the yoga about half the time when he got up in the morning. Usually it was at the office, but sometimes at home. He didn't miss it terribly if he didn't do it, but he definitely felt better if he started the day off by slowly getting the kinks out of his body.

"Dear God, I'm ready to die or go to jail and get it up the you know what for what I believe", Phil prayed, "and I don't even know if your sweet love is going to save me." For that matter, he didn't know if his own kids or family would be by his side.

"One more thing?", he said, "will you still love me if I demand blood for blood from someone that tries to hurt my family, I hope so."

He was thinking of the imaginery conversation that he had been having with himself. Phil had been working out scenarios about what he'd do if someone threatened his family. Although there may be very little that he could do about such threats, he just wanted whoever to know that he'd be after such people to the very max till the day he or they died.

Phil had a way of talking sometimes that was fairly unique. When in a conversation, he would sometimes say a codeword, such as the name of a song or something else. For example in a conversation he said Rainy Day Women, which would mean nothing to the uninitiated, but many would recognize it as the name of a Bob Dylan song. To Phil the song told a story, so in a debate or the like, he could just say Rainy Day Women and anyone familiar with the song would suddenly be faced with a whole litany of images and arguments.

"You could look at a map of the world and not be able to find the oceans", Phil slandered Sharon. She as usual was able to make a good comeback, "you could stand on the beach and not be able to find the ocean!"

She had wanted to know how much he was smoking and when was the last time he had bought any from Jack.

"You're not my auditor or my thought police!", he yelled at her. It was the same with Vaughn, he thought to himself as those words left his mouth. Vaughn sometimes asked him how much business he was doing with U.S. companies versus Japanese companies and he didn't like that either. He didn't want to tell Sharon that he thought that she might be right in hounding him to do it less, just as Vaughn might be correct for keeping after him.

Phil hid things with some care and thought to it's effectiveness. He generally had a backup object to conceal the general location of the contraband as well as a second method of concealment. Behind the computer monitor, the pipe sat and the monitor was moved to provide the primary hiding place. Then a

bottle of white out was used to plug the small hole between the monitor and the computer hutch. If not covered, the "hole" was still relatively easy prey for the curious.

Phil's mind wandered constantly, it was his brains way of looking for something more interesting to do.

The Bumblebee was a great bug, thought Phil, "it demands your respect ,because no matter how big you are, you have to freeze and assume a submissive posture when it's in your face.

God works in mysterious ways passed through Phil's mind a lot as he pondered everything from war and peace, economics and science, the birds and the bees and the words on a page.

The hard stuff, such as mushrooms were several steps above smoke in their effect. Smoke forced Phil to open his eyes, but it didn't allow him to see any better than normal. The shroom and it's synthetic cousin, had the effect of putting on a pair of glasses that improved everyones eyesight to at least 20/20. He remembered being in the K-Mart one halloween after eating shrooms and noticing everyone's little scars on their faces. Almost everyone has at least a small scar or permanent blemish and in his condition that day, he could see them like never before. He felt like Ted Williams or Clark Kent for a few minutes that evening.

When he first tried the stretching, the expression on Phil's face was one of a man being tortured. After a while though, it became an expression of serenity as he reached positions he had never reached before. It was like having a jacuzzi, a loofa backrub and a painless chiropractic adjustment all at the same time.

School of fish, for three strang days

Nirvana, "Ain't what you got, it's what you give."

Make it a dialogue not a diatribe.

"How do you keep those dogs from jumping up on the glass sliding doors?", Jill asked.

"I beat them", Phil said.

"Beat, them, what do you beat them with?", she wasn't sure how seriously to take him.

"Wood mostly", Phil replied, "but sometimes I use metal or other things".

Jill's mind conjured up images of wooden 2 x 4's, baseball bats and metal broom handles. Phil cracked a smile and Jill knew now for sure that he was joking.

"You know, I thought I got gas this morning on the way to work, but darn it I forgot the gas", Phil was on the make and he knew that he could admit to Jill that he had a smoke induced memory lapse.

With her such an admission was no big deal, whereas with Sharon, it would not be a good subject to bring up. Since she occasionally smoked herself, she did not have nearly the negative opinion about it as Sharon had. That was the thing they had in common that had brought them together in the first place.

Phil told her that he was, "prayerfully Looking forward to a heavenly afterlife."

One of the excersises that Phil was soing dailly now, was to roll onto his back, extend his legs and grab hold of his ankle or feet. He still could not do this with his legs completely straight, but he could stretch enough to put a smile on his face and make his legs, neck and back feel a little better. This was about the minimum that he did daily at this point, he usually tried to do a few more stretches, such as the reverse of this one.

He found that it was easier to make his ears pop, if he inhaled through his nose.

"What is the real truth about religion?", Phil asked his mentor, "everyone seems to think that them and their's are going to Heaven and that everyone else is damned, who's right about all of these questions".

"Why don't we ever get an answer when we're knocking on his door?"

"The truth is almost always somewhere in between", the old man answered.

Phil settled back into his big swiveling office chair in the lotust position, he wanted to be comfortable while the old man continued his important explanation. But that was it and then the old guy was gone, just faded out of Phil's imagination.

"Hey come back here, face the music!", Phil said outloud to the vapor, "come back and tell me that again, don't cop out on me now". But it was too late the old man couldn't come back for a while since the rising son that Phil was calling was inside him not outside.

Phil tried to jog his mind to get the old man back, but he didn't know how to do it, in front of his face on the bulletin board was a postcard from the local church that said celebrate the rising son, but he didn't notice it and probably wouldn't have made the right connection anyway.-

We met as soul mates at Paris island and we left as inmates from an asylum.

"You're a few years younger than me, but you'll catch up to me someday", Phil said.

"I don't get your point, if there is one", replied Vaughn.

"Time converges like the lines in a "perspective" drawing, because eventually we all meet at one point on the astral plane and that point is death. Since you're younger, you might get there later than me, but you still will make it there, what I don't know is if for me that point is a black hole, heaven, hell or what", Phil told Vaughn.

"I have confidence that I know what awaits me", said the Pastor, "and that's eternity with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"I don't know if you're smarter, dumber, the same as me or something else", Phil told Richard, "and I don't care much either way."

Richard seemed to be getting more irritated as Phil kept talking, "I do believe that blacks are probably superior physically, based on evidence that I see around me and I'm not ashamed to admit believing what I believe on these subjects."

Another type of stretch that the old man showed Phil was the splits. The old man was excellent and could split like a gymnast. Phil started doing it and found it to be one of the most beneficial stretches of all.

The rulers on earth are just propped up by others of similar ilk and they are the last hurrah of that corrupt breed which has had the people of God in a stranglehold since the beginning of time.

"As arbitrary as I want to be", answered Phil. "I haven't seen any of my employees watch out for my welfare as much as they look out for their own, so I'll be as self-centered as they are in dealing with them."

"Won't Jesus be glad to see you, when you don't think you have a prayer"

"I'm going fishing", Phil said as he left the house and the quarrel he and Sharon were having. It was one place he could go to get away from her when she was having a fit. He'd carry the inflatable dingy on his back and paddle out to a secluded place in the 15 acre lake, where he couldn't hear her, even if she yelled at him from the bank.

"I'm probably less patriotic than the next guy", said Phil, "basically I don't think any country's as great as it's patriots make it out to be."

It's a place where you don't have to make excuses.

"In a nutshell, I think Christians may be better off than non-Christians, but I don't think they're any better", Phil baited the pastor.

Overthrow in the name of love", Phil said as he cut the smoke with seeds and stems.

You do this and you do that", said Vaughn accusingly, "I could get people to put a lot of heat on you for any of those things."

"Yeah, you could", said Phil without any fear, "and you only know the half of it."

Vaughn looked nervous, "what's the other half, better or worse than the one I know."

"That's for me to know and you to try and find out", Phil egged him on.

"Right now my only real business partners are my wife and my computer", said Phil, "my employees still have too much to learn about the business to be called potential partners."

"I may be too hard on them, but I don't think any of them are really on the ball".

"I think you're too easy on them if anything", said Sharon.

"Well, maybe, you're just a lousy manager", Vaughn chimed in.

"By the way what were you doing on the floor, when I came in", said Jack, "I know you were on the floor, because I could see you through the winow."

"What do you think I was doing", replied Phil a little irritated. He had the mini blinds down and plastic film on the windows to keep the draft out and he had assumed that this gave him a little privacy.

"Hell, I don't know", Jack laughed, "with you it's hard to tell."

"I was doing what most people do when they get down on the floor on their knees, so figure it out."

He had actually been stretching with the intention of praying too, but he hadn't gotten around to much of either one yet.

Mostly he had just been laying on his back and relaxing as the prelude to his stretching routine. Being a monday, his muscles were a little tight since he usually didn't do any stretching at home. Sharon would probably think any stretching was satanically inspired, so thus far he just did it at work. Because of this tightness, he had to take a minute or two just to lay on the floor and normalize his spine's posture before attempting to do any stretching.

"I don't care what they do to me", said Jack, I probably deserve anything I get, I just can't bare to think of my loved ones suffering."

"I believe that I have both, very little right to questions anything the church tells me and I also have every right to question them, I just don't know which option I should exercise. The culture that this church created, gave me every thing I have including guaranteeing my right to protest, so they are in some respect my master and probably the closest thing in this world to the masters voice.

"You're being unfair to us", the employee said.

"no I'm not", said Phil, "I try to treat all employees equal and give them work, raises and promotions based how much they do for me or on seniority if all other factors are equal."

"Well I've done as much as Clark, and now you're letting me go, that's not fair".

Phil answered him, "That's your opinion. I've gone through the ledger to see how much I've paid you and I've gone through my mind and reports to see how much you've produced for me, that's how I decided and I think it's fair."

"For one brief instant they think they're safe and warm,...the fire inside", Bob Seeger.

"Today and tomorrow matter, yesterday does not", the old man told Phil, "so don't let it consume you like a fire inside, ...burning you up."

"Yeah, it looks like the consultants and the CEO'S are the only one's getting rich in today's tough business climate, it means we're all crooked or we're all smart", said Phil.

"No, it means you're a crook and it doesn't have anything to do with whether CEO's are crooks or not", Vaughn was right this time.

Now it's the straw that broke the camels back?" Phil questioned her, "is that what you're saying?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying, now it's starting to hurt us in the wallet and I'm not going to stand for it"

Phil looked her up and down and she looked him in the eye. "Well then maybe you should buy me a bag."

"Get a grip she yelled, you're ruining our lives."

"If I'm ruining your life by smoking leave me for that, if you're leaving you for not being a provider, but don't leave me for breaking the camel's back."

Sharon understood the gist of his remark, but saw it as being totally irrelevant, Phil wasn't sure of it's validity, but he used the argument anyway to try and save his skin, one more time.

"You women are natural detectives", Phil told Sharon, at least your always asking me questions so that you can track down every move I've made every day. The only time you let up is if you think your man's a well trained companion dog that will always do exactly what you want him to do.

"Even so you still never do trust that we won't fool around, so you never ever let up on us entirely and just be the partner your supposed to be instead of the manager you're trying to be".

One more thing he said, "you gals are no Columbo or Sherlock Holmes. It's a good thing we don't realize what you'all take us for, if men did, women would be back in a position of mental submission where they belong."

If my work wasn't good, why didn't you tell me", said the employee.

"I didn't tell you, because some things go without saying."

"What do you mean", answered Tim defensively.

"I mean, that there have been a lot of things, and they've added up to the conclusion in my mind that you're in it for you and not for us and I need someone who I feel is a little more in it for us than I think you've been."

Sharon who was sitting in the room thought back to Phil's earlier comment about breaking the camels back and she was mad.

Secretarys, preen and strut like peacocks in... sting

"And you may ask yourself, self how did I get here", David Bourne, the talking heads,..."same as it always was..." "And you may say to yourself, my God what have I done,

"Into the clear blue water, ... same as it ever was."

"And she said she was pretending, like she knew the plan", Eric Clapton.

11/9/95

When it looks like you're on easy street, there's danger at the door, ... but what I want to know, is are you nice,... it's a buckdancers " the grateful dead.

"I've been in love a million, times, the only thing I have to do is remember my lines...give it up baby", ZZ Top.

I took a journey out into the sea, I took with me the teacher, who found fun instead of me", Jethro Tull

Then the teacher told me he had a lot of fun, he thanked me for his ticket and all the things he done

They took your life, they could not take your pride", U2.

Phil decided not to get the visa account, or to work to keep either of his employees. Neither of them had proven himself yet, so he would rather not bust his butt to bring in enough work for them to be assured fairly constant work. He would instead try to keep the one that had proved that he could at least do a report on his own, even if he still needed a lot of help.

Phil would probably just have to go back to doing more of the telephone work himself. That was okay however, since he had never really stopped, doing it and he knew more shortcuts than anyone else. If the third employee panned out, maybe he could be kept in the network as a "project" basis employee. The key would be to keep a few people in the pipeline at all times that would agree to work on a project basis. This fit in very well with what he told his customers.

He just had to give the most work to those who did the best job for him and thus kept the customers happy.

As for the Visa, he figured that most people wouldn't mind paying by check, especially when he told them that the credit card company took 30% of his commission. Maybe there was a reason that one of the banks visa departments had 666-6666 as a phone number.

"Listen to my story, I will make you a believer", the song said. "I'll make you a believer, interesting line", said Phil.

"The only good reason that I'm doing market research and competitor intelligence reports, is to have enough money to take care of you and the kids", Phil told Sharon.

"That's a good reason", she replied although inside she knew better.

Phil snickered a little, "I know that I'm putting a burden on you and the kids if I justify my work by saying I'm doing it for you. I guess I'm not really doing for you all anyway, guess I'm really doing it for myself. I'm just too lazy to take the high road and get a real job."

"Maybe you're anemic, you might just need more iron in your diet", Sharon replied trying to lighten their conversation, since she knew Phil was uncomfortable.

"All I'm saying is that there is a gentle way, a way that we can be a kinder, gentler nation and in that respect I agree with George Bush. In other ways, such as a one world government or authority, I'm disagreeing>"

"And it goes the same for Jesus and God, I'm disagreeing that your basic evangelical Christian line of reasoning and religion is the best as far as truth and authenticity and as far as living their message, I think they have done as bad or worse than any other group of people on earth."

Share the office," Phil thought, "that way I'll have complete access to the office, I won't have to store things away or sell the, and I can still get about \$200, per month from them, they can add a desk or

whatever if they want to make the middle office customized for their use, I'll have a key to my office and I can pass through theirs, but they won't be able to pass through my half. Ideally I'll find a traveling salesman or someone else that's only there occasionally. This way I retain full rights to the whole premises and get some additional income to pay for copy machines."

He had thought of the idea while he was cutting the lawn just after having a smoke and Sharon knew it. "That's probably the devil telling you what to do again", she said. Phil didn't think so, in fact he and lots of other guys straight or otherwise often got their best ideas while doing something monotonous, like mowing the lawn or driving long lonely distances. She didn't understand how those long moments or hours of aloneliness could be enjoyable or even very bearable, she needed something on her mind all the time, it was the old thing about idle hands being playthings for the devil and she of course also saw it as being applicable to the brain as well as the hands. Phil didn't think he was ever inspired by the devil although he did believe he was sometimes attacked by him. At these times he would say help me Jesus or Jesus save me, but he had never asked the devil or Buddha, or Mohammed or Confucius or Krishna or a tree deity or anyone else for assistance. Now he was going to try praying to abba father, or abba God.

If someone else wanted to, that was their business and if they wanted any more opinion they could ask. In the meantime, he would get a few things going for income, such as a full or part time outside sales job, a base salary car and phone allowance and he'd make steel toed kevlar boots and other protective clothing on the side. Maybe just by selling the idea to the proper people and by getting it made and hopefully patented.

He hoped the kids would not smoke, if they did, it may be his fault, he wasn't sure. In any case he was sorry that he had ever gotten started and would be sad if they started and he'd be sadder if they got hooked on it.

"I know I haven't made my money very honestly", said Phil, "I've been a liar and a thief".

Then he snickered, "but I've been a good one and I've worked hard and fairly smartly at it". He believed the words he was saying and also badly wanted to change the way he was living. He was still the angry young man, whose future looked quite bright to the casual observer, who therefore couldn't understand Phil's rebelliousness.

But now at the age of forty, he could see that the future looked quite bright businesswise, if he could just get out of that job. He thought of the words, get back on your feet, just take your best shot and don't blow it", from the song on the radio.

Phil was sitting at the meeting with Mr. Yamaguchi and he was typing notes from the meeting directly into his notebook sized computer. He took it everywhere and it recorded everything he did.

Now after several years of using computers, he was getting very comfortable with them. At first they were intimidating, because they were hard to understand and they were prone to lose all your hard earned data if you made a mistake or if you didn't back them up and they crashed. Now however he had learned some lessons, the hard way, about how to back up data files and how to get a lot out of the computers. He had learned that they were basically very logical, predictable machines that could increase his work efforts tremendously. The only problem with them was that they were extremely unforgiving of even the slightest mistake made by the operator. The current models and software had no sense of "fuzzy logic" and if you mistyped one letter of a command, it was totally no go.

"God only knows, but I think your heart would pass the test to get you into heaven", Phil told his father. His mother wasn't there at the time but he believed it for her too.

"It would be wrong for me to keep doing this", said Phil, "what's right for you is your business, I don't want to judge you and your circumstances".

"Is there anybody listening, is there anybody who sees what's going on, read between the lines, is there anybody not smiling from behind a mask." rock song.

"The good old days may not return, and the rocks may melt and the sea may burn. I've started out for God knows where, guess I'll find out when I get there... I'm learning to fly, but I aint got wings, coming down is the hardest thing, I'm learning to fly around the clouds, what goes up must come down", rock song by Tom Petty.

"If those copy machines get repo'd, it proves I'm stupid", Phil said, "I'd rather pay them off even if I don't use them much, that way people will just be assuming I'm stupid."

Sharon looked up from the sink, "people know you're an idiot, it doesn't matter how you try to twist the evidence."

As usual, she didn't see anything worth complimenting about Phil's behavior or ideas.

"That's why I'd rather hang out with the guys", Phil said slyly, "at least I know they're full of shit, you I'm not so sure of, so it's impossible to win an argument with you".

"If you haven't done anything wrong, you don't have anything to worry about", said Vaughn.

"No, you're only half right, I don't think I've done anything wrong, but I do have to worry", Phil retorted.

"That's why I'm outta here", he told her for the millionth time, "I'll never be good enough for your standards, if I stop doing everything you disapprove of, you'll still find ten other things to bitch about."

"That's because there's not a damn thing you do that's okay with me!", she yelled back.

So what's your point?", Phil replied after being lambasted by the President of the company.

"You're a son of a bitch for giving my information to the competitors", Mr. Williams replied angrily, "that's my point."

"Well screw you, that's my point", Phil replied with a scowl.

"You can't even reply with anything but obscenities", old man Williams said with disgust.

"Either that or I don't think your worth the powder it would take to blow your mind, you figure it out", Phil answered cryptically. He didn't want the old man to have the satisfaction of having the last word.

"Either Christianity is the biggest superstition or the biggest truth in the world and you know about it so you have to make up your little mind which side of the fence you're on", she scolded.

"If you're talking about Jesus, I'm not sure anymore whose side I'm trying to on, if you're talking about the organized church, I don't know if their legit or just todays version of superstitious peagan with a new name, or something in between and I'm not going to let you drive me crazy worrying about it", he finished with a big puff.

"That's what's wrong with you women", Phil accused, "you're all missing a screw. Sure us guys have a few screws loose and you don't, but you women are missing a screw!"

"What do you mean missing a screw?", Sharon said with irritation.

"Huh, oh, did I say screw, I didn't mean missing a screw, I meant something to screw with."

"I'm just a sheep of a different color", said Phil, "I'm not in your fold, and you're not my shepard, you're the wolf at the door."

"I'm not sure I want Jesus to be my shepard, like you do, I have some different ideas than you, I want to know the rest of the story."

"Yeah and your ideas are also different than the Bible", Vaughn said, "that what makes you so evil."

"Fine, I wish you'd just shun me, shoot me or shut up", Phil replied with disgust, "I question a lot of things in the Bible and I certainly am not living by it, but you aren't either. The only difference between us is that you use it to beat people on the head and the ass with and I don't. But I'll tell you one thing, despite all your moaning about being persecuted by the world, you are the world, you and your church which is not Jesus's church has been the world since at least Constatine."

"Are you going to make calls today,for appointments in Chicago ?", Sharon asked Phil.

"That's it, ride me, ride me like a pony, I like it", he replied sarcastically.

"What do you mean, ride you?", Sharon was now on the defensive, but per her usual manner, she would soon switch over to the offensive.

"I'm just joking", replied Phil trying to sooth her bruised feelings.

"Do you think I'm interogating you", she said, referencing an argument of several weeks ago.

"No I don't, I said I was joking, I meant in the bedroom or on the floor or something when I said riding me, I know you have a right to know if I'm getting anything done at work."

She was not to be soothed so easily and didn't think it was funny anyway.

"Do you realize that when Jesus said let the first among you who is without sin throw the first rock, he was talking to all of us and there has never been anyone anywhere who would be qualified to throw that stone except him, and he chose not to. Give that some thought as you prepare to throw me out like a stone."

"You're not an invincible winner, your the biggest asshole in the world and me and the kids are the ones getting hurt", she told him.

"I'm sorry you've been hurt, but I'm gonna fight the IRS, all the worlds armies, navies and airforces and anyone else that tries to lord over me and no one can tell me that I've got to believe in Jesus the same way they do or else".

Phil left and walked out of the office towards his car which was parked behind the garage, he felt like a secret agent man. A pretty face can hide an screwed up mind, he thought, but he didn't which one of them was wrong. Phil glanced at the upstairs apartment and at the top of the stairs he noticed a small cage.

"What the heck", he said to himself, "that renter better not have a dog in there".

He climbed a few stairs and then realized that it was a multi-colored rabbit in the cage. It was looking at him although it was staring right ahead. It's eyes were on the side of it's head and it could easily see danger approaching from the side as well as what was going on in front of it. It sure looked nervous and Phil wondered if this rabbit was as scared as it looked. would it be less nervous if approached in a field where it had a chance to flee to freedom. "Who know's", he thought and he recalled that every rabbit he'd ever seen looked nervous. "Heck, mabye a rabbit in a cage actually feels safer since it's got bars around it to keep out it's enemies."

"I'm just like that rabbit he thought, "am I better off staying in the cage where there's less danger or better off going out where the foxes and cats are.

"We're supposed to carry our brother, but we don't have to give him the farm too", Phil said to Vaughn.

If I fail at supporting my family, then I will have to consider getting what you call professional help", Phil told her.

"If", Sharon replied incredulously, "you've already failed, you're making only a fraction of what you used to make, get a grip, you need help now before you destroy this family".

"Go ahead and blame everything on me, that's your prerogative, but I'll still be the one to decide if and when I need help", Phil interjected.

"Then just get out!", she screamed with that look of intense hatred that sometimes swept over her otherwise beautiful face. "Somebody will make you get help, even if it's the prison psychiatrist."

Get off my conscience", he told her, instead of get off my back.

If the Christian church of today, especially the conservative ones aren't the scribes and pharasees of today, then I don't know what is. He had just heard a report that a major convention of a major conservative protestant denomination had just voted not to admit homosexuals into their fellowship. This seemed very hypocritical to him, but what he didn't know, was that the news report had been misread. The real story was that this church had voted not to allow them to be pastors, if he had heard this he would have thought twice before telling Sharon what he had told her.

One thing the conservative church had done, was forget how to have a good time, except within the narrow confines of what they thought was proper. This meant that they rebuked the use of any alcohol at all even though Jesus probably drank wine without guilt or shame. For them the only proper fun was touch football, basketball and food.

"I don't call myself a Christian for several reasons", said Phil, "I don't want to bring shame on a local church or on Jesus's name plus I'm not sure I believe some of the things the local church believes."

"You need to trust Jesus, repent and join a church", Vaughn said convincingly.

Phil shook his head side to side, "no your state church already holds sway over my life. I may not control my destiny, but I'm gonna die trying and whoever in this world's got me by `the short hairs' is gonna have a fight on their hands."

"That's your problem", Vaughn said squinting his gleaming eyes as if he was sizing up Phil, "you shouldn't be in control of destiny, Jesus should".

Phil set down his coffee cup on the table, "if that's what you think, then it's your problem, not mine. I'm not asking Jesus to control my destiny and run my life, but so far I'm still sinning like hell. I can't and don't want to blame him for my mistakes, but if I ever do anything right in this world I pray that I'll give him the credit, because I won't deserve it."

"God gave you the choice to do right or wrong, Jesus can only save you if you want to be saved. I'd say you need to unload the baggage of dirty little habits you've gathered over the years, then you'll be able to give Jesus credit, instead of worrying whose fault your sins are, admit there nobody's fault but yours and then correct them."

Phil was speechless.

Entropy, the smoke always falls out of the baggie or the baggie has a hole in it.

"I haven't really seen Johnny for 30 years", said his mother. "Oh, yes, I've seen him in 3-D with the image transferring systems that make it seem like he's here, but I haven't hugged him for 30 years."

She couldn't wait till the new technology would make it so that transportation anywhere in the universe was possible in a matter of seconds. As it was, some people had clones of themselves left back home to keep their wives or loved ones comforted, but there were some potential drawbacks of that system that had kept Johnny from doing it."

It didn't matter that it took several years to get to the nearest star even traveling at the speed of light. Since people were lived to be hundreds of vigorous years, they didn't mind saying.

"Sir, you are smashed", the man said, "Sir, I may be smashed, but you're stupid and ugly. Tomorrow morning when I get up I won't be smashed, but you'll still be stupid and ugly!", Johnny stated, borrowing from Churchill.

"You slimeatologist", Phil said jokingly to Jack.

"You know you're in trouble, when your wife makes you more nervous than the police", Jack warned Phil.

"That's because you spend more time around her", Vaughn piped in.

"You can throw the first words, punch, stone or bomb, it's your move

Is the fact that our bodies affect the reception of nearby radios, an indication that our bodies are also effected by the radio waves. Therefore, you get phrases like feel the music or the message in the song made him do it."

"Too bad impressionable teenagers can't be vaccinated against things like this", Ward told Wally and the Beaver in his kindly voice.

"My mother's a good Christian, my dad's a heathen... is that what I'm supposed to tell people!", Joey yelled.

"I hope you'd tell them that your dad's not a heathen", Phil answered, not knowing if Jeoy would believe he was sincere or not.

I know I'm a screwup, a sinner and have a desperately wicked heart, that's pretty much what "the book" says about everybody", Phil admitted, "the man upstairs is the only one who truly knows what's in my heart, so I believe he'll rightly decide what to do with me, I'm just praying for mercy".

"You'll get what you deserve", said Vaughn.

"You're not saying it, but it's obvious that you'd rather stay here than go to the pool with us", Sharon said.

"You're right, but it's only because you'd be Jones'n me the whole time we were there".

"The thing about weeds, is that the bigger and bolder they get, the more likely they are to get pulled and that's what's gonna happen to you", Sharon struck out.

There are two kinds of people, those with hard shoes and those with soft shoes. Hard shoes are for cowboy tough guy fighters like soldiers, cowboys, police and business men. Soft shoes are for the enemy, the mocasins wearing Indians, barefooted natives, commie pinko faggots, at least that's what I've been indocrinated with all my life. He looked at his plastic swiss watch and realized that he wore a soft watch when he was at leisure and a brutally hard stainless stell watch with a stainless steel band when he was at work, which to him equated itself in a few respects to war. Just like the expressions said, " all is fair in love and war", Phil was unfortunately adding business to the list of love and war.

To make it in life all you need to be able to do is walk and chew gum at the same time. After than, 90% of life is just showing up like I think Woody Allen said.

"Problem is you can only handle half of that equation", Sharon Jones'd him.

"Baby, I'm not perfect, but if you hang with me now, I'll hang with you later", Phil tried to sooth her.

"Huh!", she said after a moments thought about exactly what he meant, "just like everything else you say, trust me now and I'll be good to you later, that's a bunch of bull coming from you."

"It's truth or dare time", Phil said. "Either you take a chance with me or you don't. I'm not sure I'll be good for you later, or even around for you later, but I'm around for you now."

"That's not helping me much", Sharon interrupted, "you're hurting us by being around now and you won't even commit that you'll stay with me when I'm old, I'd have to be going crazy to take you back this time."

Sharon finished with an angrier than usual look and Phil moved a little further into the house, "let's both go crazy together, since the whole world's going nuts."

"It's going to hell", she said, "and I don't want it or you to take us with you."

"Baby I'm just saying hang with me and I'll hang with you, I don't know for sure where anyone's going, but I'm trying to be better", Phil whimpered like a puppy.

"Then stop accusing me of trying to make all your judgement calls, I only get involved when the kids are involved and your stupid head threatens to get us all in trouble", she protested.

"Me think's you do protest too much ma'am", said Phil not giving a damn anymore and trying to lighten his own mood if not Sharon's. "Everything involves the kids and I think I should have told him everything that day, it may get easier for you to tell him after one way or another I'm gone. But it's easier for me to tell him now and take my chances from the start, instead of at the finish..."

Sharon interrupted, "easier for you, that's all you care about..."

Then Phil interrupted, "sorry, I think more honest should be included too and isn't that the big thing you're always harping about how you hate people lying to you. Well of all the people I don't want to lie to, those three kids are on the very top of the list".

"You and your goody two shoes bunch may be right 50% or 100% of the time, but I'm still not gonna volunteer to let you make my judgement calls and be my thought police. You're not right on enough to tell me what to do, because you none of you even has your own ducks in order and as for the Bible, I can read and I'd rather face the music it promises, than to be badgered by your gang all the time for my morals. So shun me, shoot me or shut up!"

Sharon didn't say a word, she looked at Phil and then turned away. Her feelings were bruised and she wanted to think things out, she turned on the water and began putting dishes in the dishwasher.

The sound of a boy and a dog penetrated the silence they had created. "Dad", Joey's voice was loud and he was concerned about something, "there's a big tick on Cheesey's back, can you help me get it off."

"Sure `hun', meet me in the garage and we'll get it off", Phil looked at Sharon but she didn't return his gaze.

"Guess I oughta find a whole in the wall and crawl inside and die, that's what you want isn't it", he made a last statement of contempt and then went down the hall to the garage. Sharon didn't look up until he had turned his back and could no longer see her.

Joey was all ready for the operation he knew they'd be performing on the big shaggy mutt. "Are we gonna use the cigarette lighter?", Joey wanted to know.

"Yeah, we will", said Phil, "go ahead and push it in."

"Uh, great, I can't wait to do it", answered the boy, "can I hold it."

"Yeah, but move slowly and don't jerk the lighter, even if Cheesey jerks", Phil was concerned about getting branded by the car lighter in Joey's hands.

"I won't jerk it", Joey said assuringly, but a cigarette lighter in a little boys hands is a dangerous weapon.

"Okay", said Phil as he parted the shephard malamute's thick fur and found a tick swollen to the size of a grape attached to her back.

The ligher popped out and Joey knew what to do, taking it out carefully, he tried to touch it to the ticks swollen belly to make it release it's grip on his dog.

"Be careful", repeated Phil, "we want it to come off easy so leave the lighter on it for a minute."

Joey did a good job, but the tick wouldn't budge, instead Cheesey's fur started to smoke and burn up without actually igniting.

"Dad, what should I do", Joey wondered out loud.

"Keep it there a little longer, just protect you and me if she jerks. If she does, let her take the burn if anyone does, instead of you or me."

The question is, will all the lines on the graph, converge before they run off the edge of the paper. Just like an 8.5 x 11 inch sheet of paper only provides 8.5 or 11 inches of width for a line on a graph, the earth only provides a certain renewable amount of sustanance for it's dwellers.

Will our consumption go down enough and will the third worlds living standard go up enough and will the earths bounty last long enough for all this to happen and what monkey wrenches will the forces of chaos throw into the works in the meantime to complicate this already nearly impossible task.

"I don't mind exagerating the truth", said Phil to the personnel service company interviewer, "I just don't like to go as far as I've been going in the last few years."

"You would fit in perfectly here", said the man smiling, "why over a couple of beers I could tell you a few things we have to do around here to find good personnel for our clients."

Phil laughed, recalling the man's opening question about how would he describe to "your eight year old son, what you do for a living."

This had seemed funny to Phil, since his son was eight and the interviewer had just intuitively guessed that. Phil had had a conversation with Joey about one year ago in which he had told the boy, that he told lies at work and that he felt bad about that aspect of his job. Then just the other day, the boy had mentioned that conversation to Sharon and said that his dad had told him that he had to tell lies at work.

"Don't let anyone make you feel like a red-headed step child, feel okay about yourself and tell them all to take a hike if they've got a beef with you, then be ready, willing and hopefully able to put up or shut up."

If I had a nickel for every stupid thing I've done, I'd be a millionaire", Phil said, "if I had a nickel for every smart thing I've done, my pockets would be half full."

"There're different personalities all around me, each one telling me how to run my life, what am I supposed to do let all of them control me?", Phil blurted out.

"No do your whatever you want but do the right things", she answered.

"Yeah do what you decide is right, right?"

"No do what the Bible says is right, that's written in stone"

"Yeah but who wrote it on stone and did they get it all from God, that's what I want to know and until then, I'm not going to take the King James version or the this or that version or some preachers interpretation as gospel truth, I'm gonna follow my consciences version and pay or be repayed when I meet my maker",

"If you don't behave, I won't take you with", Phil told Sharon.

"Take me with you where?", she said,

"Wherever I'm going", he replied.

"You're going to hell", she sniped back although not entirely decided about it in her mind.

"Well that's your choice or problem, not mine", Phil preached, "you can go wherever you're going and I can go wherever I'm going and we can do it together or apart or both, it's up to you this time."

"All I know is that I'm being driven to hell in a handbasket and I want to get out - God willing, if you help me or not is up to you."

Why don't you hang out with anyone that doesn't do what you do", Sharon quizzed Phil.

Phil moved up in the recliner taking a more dominant stance in his lazy boy. "What am I supposed to do, hang out with the gang from church? They'd shun me or turn me in, I can't be completely open with them now. I can talk about anything with my other friends, so that's who I hang with."

He had decided that a good offense was a good defense, per the coaches advice. "I never think I'm immortal or anything special for that matter. But I think God can make me or anyone do something special and immortal in the hereafter.

"He can also do bad things to you eternally", Sharon piped in.

"Amen", Phil replied, his eyes opening wider, "he sure can and no matter where in the world you go, you can't get away from him if he wants you."

"All you can do is threaten to destroy me and maybe succeed in destroying me, but I doubt you'll find the happiness you expect even with me gone. You won't be okay till you realize that just like my problems are my fault, your problems are nobody's fault but yours."

"Another position", said the old man, "is the bearskin rug."

He laid down on the carpeted floor and assumed the position of a bear skin rug. He extended his chin, but unlike the bears his mouth was shut. "This allows you to feel yourself all over and start the day off, in touch with yourself", he said.

"Yeah, right, I can hear the comments from the peanut gallery now", Phil said back to him.

"Maybe we should let women run the world after all", Phil told the old man, "with the way they love to talk, they'd spend all their time negotiating endlessly, they'd probably never get around to giving the troops marching orders."

"Has that ever been tried?", Phil asked.

"Not that I know of, at least not generically across the board, at least not on earth. Maybe you guys can learn from your women and talk endlessly too instead of shooting each other."

The world has been a litany of small groups of people breaking away from their people to try and form their own utopia, it's never happened, but people probably will not stop trying anytime soon.

Phil's new business was house painting, but he would be an artist as well as a house painter. He loved paint and this way he would get paid for doing it as well as being able to mix the stuff and learn about doing it on canvas.

The old garage at the office would make an excellent studio and place to conduct business. He would aircon and heat it, put an electric heater there permanently in the winter and an airconditioner in the summer, he would continue to insulate it and eventually reside it. Like the consulting business, this could be something that would be used in times of financial need, he would work alone with the power roller.

"You're just too messed up to hold a regular job", was Sharon summation of the current situation. "If you were not messed up, you could just hold a regular job like everyone else."

"Regular jobs don't let me be free", he argued.

"That's weak", Sharon snidely replied.

"Every job I've ever worked at, you have to conform to the norms of that company or else your harrassed or fired", he tried to make a case for himself.

"As long as you can do a job well, no one cares about anything else about you", Sharon protested strongly.

"Yeah and that's the other half of it, society won't do business with you unless you're one of them and I'm not. That's why you see disillusioned minorities, they also stand out as being different, so they're outsiders too, unless they conform or are brilliant or something. Well I'm not brilliant or going to conform, so I'll make my living on the fringes of your society."

Evolutionary Christianity, is a reasonable theory Phil thought although he wasn't sure it was correct. From some caveman, to Akhenaten to Moses to Jesus. All have been worshiped at one time or another, although from what he had learned about the three, none of them deserved it.

Just as evolution and dinosaurs in and of themselves don't contradict monotheism, he didn't feel that he had to say poo to scientific evidence. It would in his opinion not contradict monotheism either in the long run.

He found the west's cowboy mentality about as valid as their demand that every knee would bend to the God they had defined, not to the God that had defined the universe.

Pagans and other multi-theistic religions and cults that grew up around ascended masters, or trees or whatever were not right, because they had stopped evolving too soon to see that they are subject to the God of monotheism.

Was it possible that all of these cults and denominations and religions would evolve into one happy family of man that would let everyone decide freely what they wanted to believe and also be able to police the world?

Only under a supernatural savior was it likely that the family of man would unite under God, did this mean that savior would demand every knee to bow to him on earth as it is in heaven. Phil no longer believed in Jesus as his personal savior and no longer believed that Jesus was who he said he was and didn't believe everything that the churches said he should believe.

Being at the end of his stash and the end of his rope, Phil looked down on the floor under his desk to see if he could find a piece of resin or leaf.

"Viola, ureka, bonanza", said Phil. He had spied a tiny bit of resin stuck to the carpet.

Using his fingernails, he pulled it off the carpet yarn. It had a single filament sticking out of each end from where it had been stuck to the carpet. Phil held it under the desk lamp and examined it. Taking the space shuttle swiss army knife from his pocket, he selected the scissors, cut away the minute filaments and dropped the resin into the bowl.

Phil felt like he was the defendant and the wife and kids were the plaintiffs in this lawsuit called marriage. He didn't mind it, in fact he liked it most of the time, but men did not have the automatic power and authority they used to have in a family. Now the man had to use something other than muscle to legally control the family and that often put him at something of a competitive disadvantage with women. Of course there were still millions of neanderthals and cro-magnons out there who still used force on women. Virtually all men still had the genetic tendency towards anger and violence because these and related genes were epidemic in humans, they had been essential for survival in the past and could be again at any time, so they were hard to lose, they were the fight or flight genes.

when he went in for the lung transplant. He had

Phil is a part time laborer at a restaurant, hoping to make it to chef someday. He has flashbacks to an earlier life as a smuggler and consultant and smuggler. In the century that he lives, man can live more or less indefinitely, as his recent chain saw accident proved. He accidentally cut his own neck when his chain saw kicked back on him. But since downloading was a civil right, his insurance had paid for it. He kept trying to drop his insurance so that he could die, but since it was part of universal health care, he could not turn it down. So here he was, back in his old job, just days after his own funeral, which he had attended. He had been suicidal for weeks, which was very rare in this age. Virtually everyone was happy and peaceful, like a billion Forrest Gumps, life was a box of chocolates for most people. Even

government seemed perfect, it provided everything for everyone, like a behemoth beehive, ordered and engineered to the hilt.

Phil would have been like that too, if it wasn't for the dreams at night and the visions during the day that he had. Vision's of someother man, someone like him, who had lived long ago somew

END OF NIRVANA

BEGINNING OF NEW STORY

"It makes it so that sometimes you can't sit still and you need to move. You can't stay seated, you'd squirm, instead you just got to get up and boogie or play a sport or walk or something. This is all related to the reason that the man don't like the stuff. He don't want you to see that his way isn't the only way and he's not into the boogy woogy at work."

"Do you use the stuff", Vaughn demanded.

"Don't be ridiculous!", Phil replied trying to deflect the question.

"Well!", Vaughn asked again. "Do you?"

Phil had thought about his answer to these questions many times, "your question is ridiculous, if I answer, you'll just ask me more so I'm telling you `nada'".

"You're obviously hiding something", Vaughn said scrutinizing his acquaintance. He saw Phil as a threat to his cult and wanted something he could pin on him when the time came.

"If you don't like it lump it", Phil replied while getting up to leave the room. He didn't appreciate being interogated every time he had to meet with the man.

"I'm against abortion, but I don't think I'd ever fight to stop it", Phil reflected as he entered the office of the pastor.

His imagination looked up from his papers. "Well then I think you're wrong", he said.

"I can believe whatever I want, be a coniseur of anything I want and do whatever I want as long as I don't hurt anyone else and this church should leave me alone", Phil plopped down in a chair and sighed a big sigh.

"You're wrong about that too, Phil", his imagination went on, "because you don't seem to know when you're hurting others sometimes."

"Well I'm gonna follow the dictates of my own conscience not your's", the younger man protested.

"I'm not talking about my conscience", the Pastor went on. "I'm talking about the word of God."

"That's easy for you to say, Pastor, but every other guy out there seems to know what God want's and if a guy listens to all of them, he'd never be able to do anything", Phil defended his position.

"I'm not talking about what people say about God, I'm talking about what's written down in his Bible. It's all right down on paper, clear as can be", the old Pastor argued.

"Yeah, it's written down on paper, but it's not clear, everyone tells me it means something different", Phil continued debating.

"Well all the major churches agree on a few things, so those are the things you must adhere to", his imagination concluded and went back to reading his Bible.

"I don't know what to think", Phil said, rising out of the comfortable over stuffed chair. He knew that his imagination had concluded his remarks and it was time for him to go though, that had been made clear by his going back fastidiously to his scriptures.

"We used to live with adversities and threats to our existence all around us. We did our best to survive them and reduce them, but we realized that they were a part of life. Now we no longer accept them and think we can vote for or invent utopia. Most people believe this so much that they are willing to destroy everything out there that they see as standing in the way. That's where religions, governments and gangs come in, they are the one's that claim to have the right to tell us who's in the way. They tell us that it's for our own good and that God has told them so. They sometimes say that it's for the victims own good too, or at least that he had it coming.

"Melisa flips out when I tell her half the truth", Jack said. "There's no way I'm gonna tell her the whole truth about how I feel about things."

"So this is what you do!", Sharon scolded sarcastically. "You go for one of your so called rides in the country for half and hour, then come down here and kick this punching bag and excersise for another half and hour. You sure are working hard!"

"That's the whole idea", Phil tried to deflect her attack. "The whole idea is to do what you want with your life, not be a prisoner to the rat race."

"Well it's no wonder the bills aren't getting paid", Sharon threw the plate at him and attacked. Her fingernails dug into his throat as he squirmed, pinned in his recliner. After a couple of seconds, she let go and he rose. Smack he slapped her good and hard across the face.

"Don't you ever do that to me again!", his girlfriend yelled.

Maybe we are the dust mites of the Universe, blown here by the breath of God. Maybe in this infinite universe, we're as widespread as dust", Phil imagined.

"I hardly think so", said Jack. "I think you're letting your imagination get carried away."

"I expect the same fifth amendment rights to be respected by you as I'd get from the government", PHil told her.

"I also have declared Independence from the government", Phil went on. "But I haven't declared it from you and I'd like to keep it that way"

"As far as the government is concerned, I'd like them to treat me as an independent state. I will treat them the same."

"Wow, you've really lost it now", Sharon said, her eyes opening wider.

"I just want to exercise my God given right to the pursuit of happiness. I won't hurt society and I expect for it not to hurt me."

"You are crazy and you already are hurting society", Sharon retorted. "Look at your life, it stinks, everything you do is detrimental to society."

"Well that's your opinion", Phil said defensively. "I know you're at least partly right and I'm trying to change things. With a little help from above maybe I will."

"You're possessed!", Sharon said, not knowing for sure whether she believed her diagnosis of him or not. "You think you're the Messiah or something, don't you?"

"If I ever did, I was suffering from delusions and I would be ashamed to even admit to doing that, because it's probably blasphemous. I just hope and pray that I'm doing something on the plus side, not the negative. I don't have any direct line to anyone, so all I've got to go on is my own conscience and gut feelings. I'm not going to voluntarily forfeit those and go by someone else's."

"There are a lot of things you can do while you're talking and there are a few things you can't. I'd rather do than talk and you'd rather talk than do, so don't you think it's a drag to be around you?", he told the man.

"There are lots of things worth doing, but not that many worth talking about. Especially when all that talking keeps you from doing the worthwhile things.

"No one has the right to run me into the ground, work me like a dog and wear me out", Phil said.

"You're doing it to yourself worse than anyone else is", Sharon defended herself.

"Yeah, but I'm doing it to me, not to you", Phil replied.

There are times when you just have to stop what you're doing, whatever it is and listen to the music on the radio. "Hey you!", by Bachman Turner was one of the many songs that had this effect on Phil. He stopped typing on the computer and swiveling his chair put his feet up on his desk. Phil pulled the radio down using the rope and pulley system he had put together and turned the volume up until the pounding rhythm beat against his head at 100 decibels. The words and music were being driven into his head and the drums beat against his body ecstatically. The song ended and Phil turned the volume back down to about halfway on the old boombox's scale.

"Just as I want the right to privacy from my government, I also want it from my family, friends and everyone else. I'll leave your private life alone if you're not hurting someone and I'd appreciate the same from you. When you or government or anyone else

Phil was pulled over because the police officer told him he wanted to give him a citation for driving safely. It was very ironic this time Phil was caught in the act. It was also a little suspicious when Phil saw in the rearview mirror that Vaughn was pulling up on the shoulder behind his own car.

"What are you going to do now", Vaughn sneered at Phil. "Take on the whole U.S. Government with your hands tied behind his back?"

Phil didn't answer except to himself, "yes, behind my back and barehanded, unfortunately." He knew he was taking on the whole U.S. government and the whole world's government whether he liked it or not.

On the radio as he was hauled away from his car was the song "If you don't like the way I'm living, you just leave this long haired country boy alone", by CDB.

"Change that to God is great, Religion can be bunk", Phil said as he walked back into the Pastors office. Sitting down he began a conversation, this time trying to be less judgemental and more conciliatory.

Mind your own business and I'll mind mine", Phil told the neighbor.

"You seem to know so well what's best for me, that you've forgotten that we should worry about the mote in our own eye, not the one that may be in our neighbors."

"My best friends pet peeve is number two on my list and other peoples are after that. My own pet peeve is number one with me, just as my friends is number one with him", Phil said.

"Oh that's real profound", Vaughn said sarcastically.

"I'll be your friend, but I'm telling you right now my goal is to convert you so we'll see more eye to eye", Phil told the devil worshipper.

"Well I won't!", Vaughn spat out. "Maybe I could if you were some other type of heathen, but you worship the devil, so unless you repent I won't even be your friend."

"I just found a million dollars someone forgot...inside out and upside down", Guns and Roses.

Joey meanwhile was explaining to Sharon about the business project he was doing in his third grade class. She listened attentively as usual, while Phil who was also stuffing envelopes, heard it only out of the corner of his ear.

Phil heard Joey say the number 666 and his ears perked up. Alarmedly, Sharon reacted, speaking to the boy in a fast pitched voice.

"666, that's not a good number to choose", she told him urgently. "That's the number that the Bible says it very, very bad."

Joey was not sure of the meaning of all this, but it did jog his memory about something that he knew was bad. "I picked 555 for the first prize", he said defending himself. "666 was only for the grand prize."

Phil listened with interest and wondered what the boy meant by that, but figured it was very innocent on his part. It was also interesting to see Sharon's carefully measured response.

"I'm not saying you're bad or that you did anything wrong", she told her son. "I'm just saying you should choose a different number than 666."

"I will", Joey said hastily. He didn't want to blaspheme even though he didn't even know what the word blaspheme meant. He did know that when mom spoke in that tone of voice it was important and he knew that the Bible was more important than mom or apple pie.

Joey came back down the stairs to Phil's office, he looked only a tiny bit shaken, but he had learned a lesson.

Phil couldn't resist a little joke, "whatever possessed you to pick that number." Joey didn't seem to get the joke even though Phil had accented the word possessed.

"I didn't mean anything Dad", Joey said.

Phil was a little embarrassed that he was joking about that number, especially since the boy did not get it.

"Dad, I can't lick anymore envelopes right now, Mom wants me to clean my room. Thanks for the fifty cents", Joey said.

"Thank you", Phil replied looking at the pile of fifty-some-odd envelopes that his son had licked and or taped shut.

"Yeah and Mom's not paying me for cleaning my room", through his sticky tongue.

"That's volunteer work, huh?", Phil said with a chuckle.

"I know", the boy laughed back as he left the little office cubical.

"Only use your powers for self defense and other good", Phil told Joey as he finished punishing the punching bag with punches and kicks.

Vaughn came in unexpectedly, having been let in by Sharon while the boys were in the basement.

"So who are practicing beating up", he sneered.

"I'm practicing defense, not beating up", Phil answered out of the side of his mouth, never looking at his neighbor.

"It doesn't look like self defense to me", Vaughn said back with one of his rare smiles. "And who do you need to defend yourself from anyway."

"People like you and other tougher people that you would like to throw me in with", Phil said letting go of a big side kick to the heavy bag.

"Well it will never work", Vaughn sneered thinking that a little torture would do Phil a lot of good.

"I'll just harden my shell, I can't help it", Vanessa said when she heard about Phil's addiction.

"Yes you can", Phil replied. "If you want to stop worrying about it you can, you know who you can ask for help with that burden."

"Certainly not you!", she snapped back.

"Well we both know that!", Phil retored just as angry as she was.

"But that's what ruined my marriage. If you're going to trip on it too, then we don't have any better chance of getting along then Sharon and I did or you and Jack did.

"You would have me ashamed of darn near everything I believe in or do", Phil told Vanessa. "Well I'm not going for it, you have your conscience and I have mine, so don't start telling me how I should live my life. Darn, you're just like Sharon!"

"If we can't plead the fifth amendment right not to saying anything that we think might hurt our case, then I don't want to go anyfurther with this relationship, maybe we should just be friends, even though you're the best thing I ever had."

Vanessa thought about it for a minute and Phil wondered if she make the same decision that Sharon had made. She had sworn that he was making her too miserable for living, so she had done the something to him. They put up with each other for a long time before he agreed to leave, like she had often asked, sometimes in the form of a demand. It was against her religion to leave him unless he was unfaithful and since he never had been as far as she knew, she could not just divorce him. However she was willing to end the marriage if he would initiate the divorce, this she saw as more legitimate. Phil had stubbornly refused for a long time because he thought that an imperfect father like him was better then no father or a surrogate chosen by Sharon. She figure she could find as good a husband as Phil out there, as long as she could start looking before she started loosing her looks.

Phil leaned over the VCR trying to fix it for Sally, the tape he had removed was badly mangled. Then phone rang quickly two times, which was Phil's "distinctive ring from the phone company for his office line.

"Do you want me to answer it?", Sharon asked, she could see he was still involved with the VCR.

"Yes please!", he told her.

A few seconds later as he was just finishing, she informed him, "it's Mr. Tanaka from Sukiya Company."

"Oh!", Phil jumped up and started jogging towards the basement where his office was. This could be an important call he thought to himself.

It took ten seconds to get to his tiny office, put on the phone headset and sit down, he was a little out of breath.

"Hello, this is Phil Glencoe", he said carefully.

"Hello, this is Tanaka", the voice on the other end said seductively. Mr. Tanaka was unusual for a Japanese businessman and Phil sensed that this was going to be an unusual conversation.

"How are you?", Tanaka asked in his smooth silky voice.

"Very well", Phil replied trying to keep in proper decorum.

"It's been a beautiful day here", Tanaka continued.

There was a second's pause and then both men spoke almost simultaneously. "That's nice, it's been a little ...", Phil started but his words collided with Tanaka's.

"That is if you care to know", Tanaka said.

There was another second of awkward silence and then Phil said, "oh I do care to know."

That seemed to break the ice and Tanaka spoke again. "I'm calling about the industrial CO2 laser market research, I still don't know if they are going to ask you to do it. It depends on some business they are doing on the west coast right now."

"Yes I remember you telling me that in our last conversation", Phil replied.

"Yes", said Tanaka. "They are having a rough time in their discussions now, so I think you have a chance, but it is small."

Phil was confused, because he didn't remember their last conversation very well, it had not been in depth. Tanaka began to explain.

"They are talking to a major buyer. If they can agree to each other's terms, then our client will have a good business here in the lasers", Tanaka told Phil. "If they have a good business they will not need your services. So I think you had better pray that they don't agree with this buyer."

Phil was taken aback a little, not understanding how these pieces were all supposed to fit together logically. Tanaka apparently didn't sense Phil's confusion.

After another awkward silence, Phil spoke up, "could you say that again, I'm not sure I..."

Tanaka politely interrupted, "if they have a good business with this big buyer, they won't need your report, but if they can't agree on the terms, then they may still need your report."

Phil understood now, if they failed to reach an agreement with this major buyer and still wanted to sell their CO2 lasers in the U.S. they would need market information. With the big buyer as a partner however, there would be no need for Phil's services.

Phil was still in a serious display mode and spoke accordingly, "we hope that regardless of the decision, they will still want good information on the market."

"No, no!", said Tanaka baitingly, "if they succeed they will not need your report at all, you'd better pray for them to disagree."

"Okay, maybe I will pray for them to disagree", he said, finally coming out of his shell of business protocol.

"Oh, but then maybe you won't go to Heaven!", Tanaka shot back at him with a very slight hint of a chuckle.

"Okay, maybe I won't pray for them to disagree!", Phil was into the wacky side conversation and played along.

Tanaka got a little serious now, maybe it was really a serious subject to him and he was only approaching it humorously to hide his discomfort with the topic.

"Why?", he asked. "No one has ever come back from there, why are you worried about it?"

"Some people have had near death experiences and claim to have come very close...", Phil explained.

"Well! That can't be proven, that doesn't mean...", Tanaka's voice grew more serious still, but it was Phil who politely interrupted this time.

"That's true", Phil said. "They can't really prove anything, maybe those near death experiences are just our brains last gasp."

He said the last three words, "brains last gasp", very carefully so that he would be sure that Tanaka would understand him. Phil wasn't sure if Tanaka would understand that he was trying to be funny. He was also trying not to cross the line of getting directly into religion, because he feared it might be too controversial a thing to discuss with his Japanese counterpart, who he barely knew.

"Ah, ha, ha, ha!", Tanaka almost roared with laughter, but he restrained himself to a more appropriate laugh. It appeared to Phil that he had played the right card in his attempt to establish rapport with Tanaka.

The conversation wound down, to a few related closing remarks and polite goodbyes from each man. Phil shook his head as he hung up the phone and smiled. He ran up the stairs to tell Sharon about his weird conversation, maybe she would find it funny.

"What time do I have to leave for my class, is it 6:30?", Sharon thought out loud.

"I guess I'll just make hamburger helper", she told Phil. "The kids won't like it, but they don't like anything anyway."

"Yeah", said Phil, returning to his office. "They're impossible to please anyway."

"I may be a f---ing glutton like you say I am", Phil told Vaughn. "But I'm not f---ing glutton for punishment, that's why I don't volunteer much information to you."

"I don't ask you anything and I sure don't care what you do with your life", his former good friend replied offensively.

"No, no, you don't ever ask me anything, you just constantly quiz and interrogate me, so you know as much as possible about what I doing. You're just so insecure, worried and out of control in your life that you want to run, I mean ruin mine too."

"I don't want to know everything you're doing", Vaughn countered. "But I do want to keep you from screwing people, so I have a right to keep an eye on you."

"Then you can sure I'll keep on keeping my personal business private and answer even less of your stupid questions", Phil finished.

The two men had been friends for many years before they started parting in their ways and beliefs. Because of that they hadn't yet stopped hanging out, even though it seemed they had almost nothing in common anymore. This was the opposite of how it had been in the old days when they were growing up back east.

"It's time for a Marriage Bill of Rights", said Phil. "Complete with the right to privacy and the right to plead the fifth."

"Well if you do all that, it's not a marriage anymore", objected Vaughn. "That goes totally against the marriage vows."

"No it doesn't, not any more than the Bill of Rights goes against the constitution", Phil argued.

"Well I'm sure wives everywhere, especially your's will just love that stupid idea!", Vaughn laughed.

Phil remembered his father's words about being a consultant to the Japanese. "You could do a poor job for them, and since they rotate their U.S. staff every three or four years, there will always be enough companies to exploit, but you wouldn't want to do that."

When Phil had heard those words, he heard a little bell go off in his head that meant, why not?

Sharon wanted to know everything and Phil was starting to realize that it was best to tell her. He was retreating from the don't volunteer anything point of view. It seemed to make them closer if he volunteered information to her, he just had to be willing to stand firm and face her anger from time to time. But if he could, then it made their relationship stronger, because there are few things that appear more weaselly to a woman than a man who's afraid to tell the woman in his life the truth.

He wasn't sure why she wanted to know everything, he thought that maybe it was a status thing with the other woman, to be the most in the know about what the men were up to. He used to think it was a control thing, with her wanting to know his every move, so she could try and control him. Now he believed that it was a different type of control thing, with the woman needing to know where she stands all the time, so she can be more in control of her life. Phil thought that this was an insecurity complex that lots of people have and felt sorry for them. He on the other hand had his own problems so he didn't think anyone needed his pity.

I MUST HAVE GOT OUT OF BED ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD OR... THE BEGINNING OF THE END

c

K.O.E.

Phil's plan was to make as much money as possible from ripping off the big Japanese and American companies then invest it in Columbian or Jamaican or even Mexican.

He figured he was ripping the companies off with his market research reports. They were paying him a lot of money to interview large numbers of experts and get reliable data on the U.S. market for high tech equipment. He was making a minimal number of calls and then largely improvising the rest. Phil took the con in consultant literally, he had from the nearly the beginning.

"It makes it so that sometimes you can't sit still and you need to move. You can't stay seated, you'd squirm, instead you just got to get up and boogie or play a sport or walk or something. This is all related to the reason that the man don't like the stuff. He don't want you to see that his way isn't the only way and he's not into the boogy woogy at work."

"Do you use the stuff", Vaughn demanded.

"Don't be ridiculous!", Phil replied trying to deflect the question.

"Well!", Vaughn asked again. "Do you?"

Phil had thought about his answer to these questions many times, "your question is ridiculous, if I answer, you'll just ask me more so I'm telling you `nada'".

"You're obviously hiding something", Vaughn said scrutinizing his acquaintance. He saw Phil as a threat to his cult and wanted something he could pin on him when the time came.

"If you don't like it lump it", Phil replied while getting up to leave the room. He didn't appreciate being interogated every time he had to meet with the man.

"I'm against abortion, but I don't think I'd ever fight to stop it", Phil reflected as he entered the office of the pastor.

His imagination looked up from his papers. "Well then I think you're wrong", he said.

"I can believe whatever I want, be a coniseur of anything I want and do whatever I want as long as I don't hurt anyone else and this church should leave me alone", Phil plopped down in a chair and sighed a big sigh.

"You're wrong about that too, Phil", his imagination went on, "because you don't seem to know when you're hurting others sometimes."

"Well I'm gonna follow the dictates of my own conscience not your's", the younger man protested.

"I'm not talking about my conscience", the Pastor went on. "I'm talking about the word of God."

"That's easy for you to say, Pastor, but every other guy out there seems to know what God want's and if a guy listens to all of them, he'd never be able to do anything", Phil defended his position.

"I'm not talking about what people say about God, I'm talking about what's written down in his Bible. It's all right down on paper, clear as can be", the old Pastor argued.

"Yeah, it's written down on paper, but it's not clear, everyone tells me it means something different", Phil continued debating.

"Well all the major churches agree on a few things, so those are the things you must adhere to", his imagination concluded and went back to reading his Bible.

"I don't know what to think", Phil said, rising out of the comfortable over stuffed chair. He knew that his imagination had concluded his remarks and it was time for him to go though, that had been made clear by his going back fastidiously to his scriptures.

"We used to live with adversities and threats to our existence all around us. We did our best to survive them and reduce them, but we realized that they were a part of life. Now we no longer accept them and think we can vote for or invent utopia. Most people believe this so much that they are willing to destroy everything out there that they see as standing in the way. That's where religions, governments and gangs come in, they are the one's that claim to have the right to tell us who's in the way. They tell us that it's for our own good and that God has told them so. They sometimes say that it's for the victims own good too, or at least that he had it coming.

"Melisa flips out when I tell her half the truth", Jack said. "There's no way I'm gonna tell her the whole truth about how I feel about things."

"So this is what you do!", Sharon scolded sarcastically. "You go for one of your so called rides in the country for half and hour, then come down here and kick this punching bag and excersise for another half and hour. You sure are working hard!"

"That's the whole idea", Phil tried to deflect her attack. "The whole idea is to do what you want with your life, not be a prisoner to the rat race."

"Well it's no wonder the bills aren't getting paid", Sharon threw the plate at him and attacked. Her fingernails dug into his throat as he squirmed, pinned in his recliner. After a couple of seconds, she let go and he rose. Smack he slapped her good and hard across the face.

"Don't you ever do that to me again!", his girlfriend yelled.

Maybe we are the dust mites of the Universe, blown here by the breath of God. Maybe in this infinite universe, we're as widespread as dust", Phil imagined.

"I hardly think so", said Jack. "I think you're letting your imagination get carried away."

"I expect the same fifth amendment rights to be respected by you as I'd get from the government", PHil told her.

"I also have declared Independence from the government", Phil went on. "But I haven't declared it from you and I'd like to keep it that way"

"As far as the government is concerned, I'd like them to treat me as an independent state. I will treat them the same."

"Wow, you've really lost it now", Sharon said, her eyes opening wider.

"I just want to exercise my God given right to the pursuit of happiness. I won't hurt society and I expect for it not to hurt me."

"You are crazy and you already are hurting society", Sharon retorted. "Look at your life, it stinks, everything you do is detrimental to society."

"Well that's your opinion", Phil said defensively. "I know you're at least partly right and I'm trying to change things. With a little help from above maybe I will."

"You're possessed!", Sharon said, not knowing for sure whether she believed her diagnosis of him or not. "You think you're the Messiah or something, don't you?"

"If I ever did, I was suffering from delusions and I would be ashamed to even admit to doing that, because it's probably blasphemous. I just hope and pray that I'm doing something on the plus side, not the negative. I don't have any direct line to anyone, so all I've got to go on is my own conscience and gut feelings. I'm not going to voluntarily forfeit those and go by someone else's."

"There are a lot of things you can do while you're talking and there are a few things you can't. I'd rather do than talk and you'd rather talk than do, so don't you think it's a drag to be around you?", he told the man.

"There are lots of things worth doing, but not that many worth talking about. Especially when all that talking keeps you from doing the worthwhile things.

"No one has the right to run me into the ground, work me like a dog and wear me out", Phil said.

"You're doing it to yourself worse than anyone else is", Sharon defended herself.

"Yeah, but I'm doing it to me, not to you", Phil replied.

There are times when you just have to stop what you're doing, whatever it is and listen to the music on the radio. "Hey you!", by Bachman Turner was one of the many songs that had this effect on Phil. He stopped typing on the computer and swiveling his chair put his feet up on his desk. Phil pulled the radio down using the rope and pulley system he had put together and turned the volume up until the pounding rhythm beat against his head at 100 decibels. The words and music were being driven into his head and the drums beat against his body ecstatically. The song ended and Phil turned the volume back down to about halfway on the old boombox's scale.

"Just as I want the right to privacy from my government, I also want it from my family, friends and everyone else. I'll leave your private life alone if you're not hurting someone and I'd appreciate the same from you. When you or government or anyone else

Phil was pulled over because the police officer told him he wanted to give him a citation for driving safely. It was very ironic this time Phil was caught in the act. It was also a little suspicious when Phil saw in the rearview mirror that Vaughn was pulling up on the shoulder behind his own car.

"What are you going to do now", Vaughn sneered at Phil. "Take on the whole U.S. Government with your hands tied behind his back?"

Phil didn't answer except to himself, "yes, behind my back and barehanded, unfortunately." He knew he was taking on the whole U.S. government and the whole world's government whether he liked it or not.

On the radio as he was hauled away from his car was the song "If you don't like the way I'm living, you just leave this long haired country boy alone", by CDB.

"Change that to God is great, Religion can be bunk", Phil said as he walked back into the Pastors office. Sitting down he began a conversation, this time trying to be less judgemental and more conciliatory.

Mind your own business and I'll mind mine", Phil told the neighbor.

"You seem to know so well what's best for me, that you've forgotten that we should worry about the mote in our own eye, not the one that may be in our neighbors."

"My best friends pet peeve is number two on my list and other peoples are after that. My own pet peeve is number one with me, just as my friends is number one with him", Phil said.

"Oh that's real profound", Vaughn said sarcastically.

"I'll be your friend, but I'm telling you right now my goal is to convert you so we'll see more eye to eye", Phil told the devil worshipper.

"Well I won't!", Vaughn spat out. "Maybe I could if you were some other type of heathen, but you worship the devil, so unless you repent I won't even be your friend."

Joey meanwhile was explaining to Sharon about the business project he was doing in his third grade class. She listened attentively as usual, while Phil who was also stuffing envelopes, heard it only out of the corner of his ear.

Phil heard Joey say the number 666 and his ears perked up. Alarmedly, Sharon reacted, speaking to the boy in a fast pitched voice.

"666, that's not a good number to choose", she told him urgently. "That's the number that the Bible says it very, very bad."

Joey was not sure of the meaning of all this, but it did jog his memory about something that he knew was bad. "I picked 555 for the first prize", he said defending himself. "666 was only for the grand prize."

Phil listened with interest and wondered what the boy meant by that, but figured it was very innocent on his part. It was also interesting to see Sharon's carefully measured response.

"I'm not saying you're bad or that you did anything wrong", she told her son. "I'm just saying you should choose a different number than 666."

"I will", Joey said hastily. He didn't want to blaspheme even though he didn't even know what the word blaspheme meant. He did know that when mom spoke in that tone of voice it was important and he knew that the Bible was more important than mom or apple pie.

Joey came back down the stairs to Phil's office, he looked only a tiny bit shaken, but he had learned a lesson.

Phil couldn't resist a little joke, "whatever possessed you to pick that number." Joey didn't seem to get the joke even though Phil had accented the word possessed.

"I didn't mean anything Dad", Joey said.

Phil was a little embarrassed that he was joking about that number, especially since the boy did not get it.

"Dad, I can't lick anymore envelopes right now, Mom want's me to clean my room. Thanks for the fifty cents", Joey said.

"Thank you", Phil replied looking at the pile of fifty-some-odd envelopes that his son had licked and or taped shut.

"Yeah and Mom's not paying me for cleaning my room", through his sticky tongue.

"That's volunteer work, huh?", Phil said with a chuckle.

"I know", the boy laughed back as he left the little office cubical.

"Only use your powers for self defense and other good", Phil told Joey as he finished punishing the punching bag with punches and kicks.

Vaughn came in unexpectedly, having been let in by Sharon while the boys were in the basement.

"So who are practicing beating up", he sneered.

"I'm practicing defense, not beating up", Phil answered out of the side of his mouth, never looking at his neighbor.

"It doesn't look like self defense to me", Vaughn said back with one of his rare smiles. "And who do you need to defend yourself from anyway."

"People like you and other tougher people that you would like to throw me in with", Phil said letting go of a big side kick to the heavy bag.

"Well it will never work", Vaughn sneered thinking that a little torture would do Phil a lot of good.

"I'll just harden my shell, I can't help it", Vanessa said when she heard about Phil's addiction.

"Yes you can", Phil replied. "If you want to stop worrying about it you can, you know who you can ask for help with that burden."

"Certainly not you!", she snapped back.

"Well we both know that!", Phil retored just as angry as she was.

"But that's what ruined my marriage. If you're going to trip on it too, then we don't have any better chance of getting along then Sharon and I did or you and Jack did.

"You would have me ashamed of darn near everything I believe in or do", Phil told Vanessa. "Well I'm not going for it, you have your conscience and I have mine, so don't start telling me how I should live my life. Darn, you're just like Sharon!"

"If we can't plead the fifth amendment right not to saying anything that we think might hurt our case, then I don't want to go anyfurther with this relationship, maybe we should just be friends, even though you're the best thing I ever had."

Vanessa thought about it for a minute and Phil wondered if she make the same decision that Sharon had made. She had sworn that he was making her too miserable for living, so she had done the samething to him. They put up with each other for a long time before he agreed to leave, like she had often asked, sometimes in the form of a demand. It was against her religion to leave him unless he was unfaithful and since he never had been as far as she knew, she could not just divorce him. However she was willing to end the marriage if he would initiate the divorce, this she saw as more legitimate. Phil had stubbornly refused for a long time because he thought that an imperfect father like him was better then no father or a surrogate chosen by Sharon. She figure she could find as good a husband as Phil out there, as long as she could start looking before she started loosing her looks.

Phil leaned over the VCR trying to fix it for Sally, the tape he had removed was badly mangled. Then phone rang quickly two times, which was Phil's "distinctive ring from the phone company for his office line.

"Do you want me to answer it?", Sharon asked, she could see he was still involved with the VCR.

"Yes please!", he told her.

A few seconds later as he was just finishing, she informed him, "it's Mr. Tanaka from Sukiyaqi Company."

"Oh!", Phil jumped up and started jogging towards the basement where his office was. This could be an important call he thought to himself.

It took ten seconds to get to his tiny office, put on the phone headset and sit down, he was a little out of breath.

"Hello, this is Phil Glencoe", he said carefully.

"Hello, this is Tanaka", the voice on the other end said seductively. Mr. Tanaka was unusual for a Japanese businessman and Phil sensed that this was going to be an unusual conversation.

"How are you?", Tanaka asked in his smooth silky voice.

"Very well", Phil replied trying to keep in proper decorum.

"It's been a beautiful day here", Tanaka continued.

There was a second's pause and then both men spoke almost simultaneously. "That's nice, it's been a little ...", Phil started but his words collided with Tanaka's.

"That is if you care to know", Tanaka said.

There was another second of awkward silence and then Phil said, "oh I do care to know."

That seemed to break the ice and Tanaka spoke again. "I'm calling about the industrial CO2 laser market research, I still don't know if they are going to ask you to do it. It depends on some business they are doing on the west coast right now."

"Yes I remember you telling me that in our last conversation", Phil replied.

"Yes", said Tanaka. "They are having a rough time in their discussions now, so I think you have a chance, but it is small."

Phil was confused, because he didn't remember their last conversation very well, it had not been in depth. Tanaka began to explain.

"They are talking to a major buyer. If they can agree to each other's terms, then our client will have a good business here in the lasers", Tanaka told Phil. "If they have a good business they will not need your services. So I think you had better pray that they don't agree with this buyer."

Phil was taken aback a little, not understanding how these pieces were all supposed to fit together logically. Tanaka apparently didn't sense Phil's confusion.

After another awkward silence, Phil spoke up, "could you say that again, I'm not sure I..."

Tanaka politely interrupted, "if they have a good business with this big buyer, they won't need your report, but if they can't agree on the terms, then they may still need your report."

Phil understood now, if they failed to reach an agreement with this major buyer and still wanted to sell their CO2 lasers in the U.S. they would need market information. With the big buyer as a partner however, there would be no need for Phil's services.

Phil was still in a serious display mode and spoke accordingly, "we hope that regardless of the decision, they will still want good information on the market."

"No, no!", said Tanaka baitingly, "if they succeed they will not need your report at all, you'd better pray for them to disagree."

"Okay, maybe I will pray for them to disagree", he said, finally coming out of his shell of business protocol.

"Oh, but then maybe you won't go to Heaven!", Tanaka shot back at him with a very slight hint of a chuckle.

"Okay, maybe I won't pray for them to disagree!", Phil was into the wacky side conversation and played along.

Tanaka got a little serious now, maybe it was really a serious subject to him and he was only approaching it humorously to hide his discomfort with the topic.

"Why?", he asked. "No one has ever come back from there, why are you worried about it?"

"Some people have had near death experiences and claim to have come very close...", Phil explained.

"Well! That can't be proven, that doesn't mean...", Tanaka's voice grew more serious still, but it was Phil who politely interrupted this time.

"That's true", Phil said. "They can't really prove anything, maybe those near death experiences are just our brains last gasp."

He said the last three words, "brains last gasp", very carefully so that he would be sure that Tanaka would understand him. Phil wasn't sure if Tanaka would understand that he was trying to be funny. He was also trying not to cross the line of getting directly into religion, because he feared it might be too controversial a thing to discuss with his Japanese counterpart, who he barely knew.

"Ah, ha, ha, ha!", Tanaka almost roared with laughter, but he restrained himself to a more appropriate laugh. It appeared to Phil that he had played the right card in his attempt to establish rapport with Tanaka.

The conversation wound down, to a few related closing remarks and polite goodbyes from each man. Phil shook his head as he hung up the phone and smiled. He ran up the stairs to tell Sharon about his weird conversation, maybe she would find it funny.

"What time do I have to leave for my class, is it 6:30?", Sharon thought out loud.

"I guess I'll just make hamburger helper", she told Phil. "The kids won't like it, but they don't like anything anyway."

"Yeah", said Phil, returning to his office. "They're impossible to please anyway."

"I may be a f---ing glutton like you say I am", Phil told Vaughn. "But I'm not f---ing glutton for punishment, that's why I don't volunteer much information to you."

"I don't ask you anything and I sure don't care what you do with your life", his former good friend replied offendedly.

"No, no, you don't ever ask me anything, you just constantly quiz and interrogate me, so you know as much as possible about what I doing. You're just so insecure, worried and out of control in your life that you want to run, I mean ruin mine too."

"I don't want to know everything you're doing", Vaughn countered. "But I do want to keep you from screwing people, so I have a right to keep an eye on you."

"Then you can sure I'll keep on keeping my personal business private and answer even less of your stupid questions", Phil finished.

The two men had been friends for many years before they started parting in their ways and beliefs. Because of that they hadn't yet stopped hanging out, even though it seemed they had almost nothing in common anymore. This was the opposite of how it had been in the old days when they were growing up back east.

"It's time for a Marriage Bill of Rights", said Phil. "Complete with the right to privacy and the right to plead the fifth."

"Well if you do all that, it's not a marriage anymore", objected Vaughn. "That goes totally against the marriage vows."

"No it doesn't, not any more than the Bill of Rights goes against the constitution", Phil argued.

"Well I'm sure wives everywhere, especially your's will just love that stupid idea!", Vaughn laughed.

Phil remembered his father's words about being a consultant to the Japanese. "You could do a poor job for them, and since they rotate their U.S. staff every three or four years, there will always be enough companies to exploit, but you wouldn't want to do that."

When Phil had heard those words, he heard a little bell go off in his head that meant, why not?

Sharon wanted to know everything and Phil was starting to realize that it was best to tell her. He was retreating from the don't volunteer anything point of view. It seemed to make them closer if he volunteered information to her, he just had to be willing to stand firm and face her anger from time to time. But if he could, then it made their relationship stronger, because there are few things that appear more weaselly to a woman than a man who's afraid to tell the woman in his life the truth.

He wasn't sure why she wanted to know everything, he thought that maybe it was a status thing with the other woman, to be the most in the know about what the men were up to. He used to think it was a control thing, with her wanting to know his every move, so she could try and control him. Now he believed that it was a different type of control thing, with the woman needing to know where she stands all the time, so she can be more in control of her life. Phil thought that this was an insecurity complex that lots of people have and felt sorry for them. He on the other hand had his own problems so he didn't think anyone needed his pity.

Everything we do is propaganda, because everything we do is meant and designed to have an effect on our fellows.

The garage door's handle hit the basement doors handle with a clang. This was Phil's new warning system.

I wish you'd just be natural and stop trying to outsmart everyone all the time.

I don't like having to try to outsmart you all the time, but I think you're partly to blame for it too.

My wife and I are President and Vice President of this home and family. The kids should not let the parents divorce if they can help it. The parents should not divorce if they can at all help it. I am the president and Sharon is about as powerful as Hillary another words she want's to be influential in the government, just like she wants to win the battle of the sexes between her and me.

"You're an interesting character", Phil told Sharon. "I like that in a mate."

"Homosexuality is abnormal, but it's a natural-abnormality, because it does occur in nature. Do monkeys start exhibiting homosexual behavior because of monkey gay bars? In my opinion the answer is yes, although monkey peer pressure may be a better answer. Or do they start exhibiting homosexual behavior because of environmental conditions like stress, or even because of genetic predisposition. Probably all of the above can be contributory causes. I tend to believe it's a natural abnormality in humans too, caused by gay bars and peer pressure, environmental stress or genetic predisposition usually in some combinations of the above.

"I'm a hypocrite and a liar worse then the average guy", Phil admittingly. "I'm not proud of it, but if what I can tell about other people is right, I'm not doing very good."

"Daddy, what's that in your hand?", asked Joey. The boy was suspicious and had a pretty good idea what it was. Afterall, his young eyes were pretty good.

Phil clenched his fist, "it's none of your business what's in my hand!"

Joey was a little scared and didn't ask anything else, but this confirmed in his mind what he had believed for three years. It confirmed to him that his dad still smoked and it confirmed to him that his father lied to him about it.

He wanted to admit the truth to the kids, but he believed Sharon was probably right that he should hold off as long as possible. The kids would figure it out for themselves, Phil decided he wouldn't lie about it again to the kids, he would try to get away with postponing the issue till they were older, but hopefully a silent understanding would develop. Maybe they could all respect each others choices and not go ballistic or become irrational. This was another of those uncertainties that Phil had to face. Another uncertainty was about how he would handle himself in court and or jail if it it happened. Would he go down easy when they came for him or go down scratching, clawing and maybe shooting till the bitter end. Would he tell the truth or lie to try and save his ass. He knew which one he rather do, but he'd never exactly had brass cucumbers.

The same thing applied for anything else "they" might try to bust him for, such as the music he liked, the way he thought about things or the way he recognized and tried to interpereted God in his life. It was unlikely that he would ever be inside the popular sheep folds that offered people so much security. That was fine with him except that it was unfortuneatly another threat to him and his. The sheep would no doubt come bleating and biting down upon them all.

The recent examples of the rebellion in Los Angeles and the riots in Lucasville were further evidence that the authorities will not protect the weak.

"I don't ever want to divorce you or leave you", Phil told Sharon. "And I hope I never do. I hope you'll do the same for me."

"I'll love and put up with you as long as you love and put up with me. I think both of us have had a hard time sometimes doing those things, but at least we're together and hopefully moving in the right direction. I'll try and stop blaming you for my problems and hopefully you do the same for me. It may get even tougher for us in the future with us aging and all the worlds temptations. So I'm gonna be blunt as hell with you tell you to stay out of the damn sun at the pool. You and I both know that I'm gonna be tempted by younger women, unfortunately for women, that's part of man's nature. You're gonna be tempted too, but I think women get fewer offers as they get older because of the obvious. Men get more offers as they get older because women look at us a little differently than we look at them. I almost hate to tell you any of this, but you always say you want the truth. You might know all of this already anyway, so what I'm trying to do is admit that I'm thinking these things and clear the air. I'm sorry if I've said too much and pissed you off.

Phil waited for Sharon's reaction, he had no idea what to expect and knew he was the one who would face the consequences of her wrath. She had earned his trust and he didn't mind not keeping anymore secret from her, but he still wished that she wouldn't ask him so many questions. Whether she cared or even realized it, her questions often caused him problems. Just as she always wanted to know exactly what he was scheming, his "involved" friends often asked, "is Sharon home or does Sharon know about this?"

If he was honest with them too, then it led to them being caused stress too. They were usually trying to keep things cool around their houses, so they also tried to keep things under wraps. These friends saw Phil as possibly a loose canon who was pussywhipped. The natural thing for them to do would be to drop Phil, which he of course didn't want.

Being married with children, Phil was able to see a young female growing up, and an adult female maturing. If he had been able to learn about women from observing Sharon, Sally and others, it would have spared them all a lot of grief.

One thing he believed in, was that life was a constant matching of wits and clashing arguments with her, whether he liked it or not. He had not figured out a way to have life with her anything else, although he wished for peace with her. She might say that if he were completely honest with her, that things would be a little better and she was right. But something made it hard for him to be as honest as she wanted, there were things in his mind that he didn't want to bear. Was it his obligation to tell her everything she asked, or should he tell her even more. That would be being even more honest with her. It seemed to him that she was as bad as him though, since she wanted to know everything but would not forgive him for telling her the things that hurt her. In his mind she was as guilty of wanting to have her cake and eat it too, as he was.

Regardless of all their problems, he believed that she was like that because she was just human. She probably did a better job of being selfless than he did and he hoped that things would work out for them long term. and that she

"We're you doing what I think you were doing?", Vaughn said highly suspicious.

"That's personal and none of your business", Phil replied irritably. This was only about the tenth time that Vaughn had put him on the spot about this.

"Like I've told you before, it is my business and I already know the answer", Vaughn said while thinking about how he would like to get a confession out of Phil even if it killed him. He was not thinking about

how he would most of all like to torture it out of Phil, but on his subconscious level, he was fantasizing about just that.

"Then I'll tell you", Phil said. Vaughn's constant harrasement was wearing him down. "But you have to keep what I tell you secret."

Vaughn laughed, "why should I keep secret, what I already know. You want me to keep common scuttlebutt knowledge to myself, no way."

"Sometimes all you know about a kid is that you love her or him. Other than that you don't really how smart, or dumb or good or bad that child will be.

"It's called hardball, because that's what it is", Phil lectured Joey. "That hard ball hurts and they play to win, so you've got to decide if it's the game for you. In any case, I hope that it won't be the only thing in your life. Be something else too, whatever it is, so you'll have something else to do when the ball games end.

"What was that", said the neighbor seeing a plumb of smoke leave the window where Phil was standing looking out of the basement.

"That was radon gas that I was exhaling", Phil said with a perfectly straight face. "I accidentally breath in a lot of it down here, so periodically I come to this window and blow it out of my lungs. There can be a lot in there sometimes.

"I'll still love you even when we're both just a bag of bones", Phil said very un-romantically. "That means I'll love you for eternity."

"Treat her like a lady", his imagination whispered into his ear. Of course only Phil could see him or hear him, but he did what his imagination suggested.

Sharon didn't know what to say.

Chapter One

I MUST HAVE GOT OUT OF BED ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD

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PHONE: 317-852-4013//FAX: 317-852-0924

Actually our story starts with a bad bout of mornining sickness, a difficult pregnancy and a man who never stuck around to see what he had wrought.

It was the cyclical nature of life which interested Phil. In one sense these cycles were beautiful, but sometimes they seemed cruel. Men work and compete to earn power and status for themselves and to

provide the means for women to adorn themselves. Women adorn themselves and compete to win the most powerful male they can get and adorn themselves to attract and keep that "provider" and "protector". The men naturally "provide and protect" as long as the women are appealing to them. The natural instinct of man would be to tend to move on to a new female or females. He would do this as long as he is a prime male just like a lion. After his strength and virility is diminished, he would be supplanted by a younger stronger male and run off.

In society however this would leave the women at a disadvantage so God or man or woman or nature has set up a system of mating for life. This provides some measure of security to all involved, but goes against the man's natural instinct to spread his seed far and wide and to pursue the most attractive young females. If he was without a conscience or coercion, he would might not adhere to this system. Nowadays it is argued by some that this system is no longer valid and argued by others that it's as valid as ever. Without it however, women and children and maybe men would suffer to an extent that I don't know.

Phil finished his pontification, Sharon and Vaughn sneered in disgust.

"That must be sick-o sermon number 99 that I've heard out of you", Sharon said.

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"It's also complete nonsense", said Vaughn. "Since you and your evolutionist cronies think we came from apes, you should compare humans to them and not lions. Apes mate for life, they are not the philanderers that you are."

"Well maybe we didn't descend from apes", Phil weakly rebutted.

The question", Sharon asked. "Is if you'll do the right thing and hit the road Jack."

"Yes that would make things easy for you wouldn't it", Phil smirked back. "After I pay for all these nice things you have, you want to throw me out."

"Well admit it, you want me to!", she screamed, "so you can go out with those young floosies and desert me."

Phil tried to change the subject abruptly, "you're too worried, you're the one who's running on all eight cylinders, not me. You'll look fine to me forever, whether they find the fountain of youth or not. I don't want you to change anything about yourself unless you want to and it's extremely tried, tested and proven safe.

"You and your sweet talk", she said. She was hoping it wasn't fake, that would make her sick.

"Ah, Yeah", Phil went on. "You're in great shape and maturing like a fine wine, why your machine's in such great shape that it purrs like a kitten all night long, no sleep apnea with you."

Now she was liking it less, "that's enough stop talking, before you wish you had."

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"We can't live without each other", Phil told his assaulter, in his momentary flash back to prison.

"Whether or not we have the responsibility to intervene in other countries like, Sudan, Bosnia, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, Panama, Somalia or elsewhere seems to depend on several things. These include economy, morals, and top government strategy. "Jobs, jobs, jobs" as the former president had said was a major reason that we went to Kuwait.

Our government does not seem to think that the jobs argument applies to Bosnia, so they are not trying to sell this war to the people. After a major cause for the Gulf war was fear that our oil supply would be cut off and that meant a potential immediate economic crisis.

In Bosnia there is an even greater economic reason to save people from genocide. That economic reason is that it might please God and he will reward or protect us for doing what is right. Of course I'm just guessing, since I don't know what God thinks. If the reported ethnic cleansing in Bosnia is true and if the Serbians think they are doing God's will I think they're mistaken and they would do well to quit.

This so called defense of Christianity in Europe is probably the wrong thing and a tragedy. This seems no more a Holy Crusade than Terrorist bombs are a Jihad. The "100 Years War" in Europe lasted 116 years the factoid on the TV Tube read. That was between Protestants and Catholics I think and seems ridiculous now, but it's being tolerated all of the world and no one's stopping them. If the U.S. really wants to be a moral leader, they could accept mercenary duty to protect beleaguered peoples. After all we have dabbled in this area in many places such as Kuwait where much of the expense was born by foreign countries. Of course we would be moral mercenaries only if we only acted to save people not nations or jobs. The last thing we need is another 116 years of religious war, advertised as Crusade or Jihad or anything else. "

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"The only thing is", Jack said, "is that it's Americans that will be killed doing this mercenary work."

"Well we have a volunteer army already, we could make participation in all wars to save Bosnians or anyone else voluntary. I don't think your government should make you fight a war you don't want to fight anyway."

"That's crazy as heck", Jack voice got louder, "It's not very smart to do that. What if foreign ships, bombs and planes are attacking us. If people don't have to serve then, we'd be in big trouble."

"Yeah, but if the country isn't worth fighting for at that point, then it's probably not worth saving anyway. I can't imagine virtually Americans volunteering in the hundreds of millions if such an attack was imminent", Phil rebutted his friend.

"But that's not how those attacks happen", Jack said back. "They happen when you let big strong nations get stronger than you, or they conspire against you."

"Yeah that's hard to fight", Phil shrugged. "That's when you trust in God to provide you with good intelligence. You can be better prepared that way and if you're out there doing the right thing in the world God may decide to protect your country."

CHAPTER two

HOLD EVERYTHING!

"Ouch!", Vaughn shouted and grabbed his nose.

Phil had just elbowed him accidentally on purpose.

"Sorry, but that's what you get when you stick your nose where it doesn't belong", Phil defended himself.

As Vaughn massaged his nose and tried to clear his head, Phil stashed things.

The meeting with Mr. Sekiyama was not going well. "What do you mean you still own that building and that you have people there who as you said, "quote pay the rent".

"That's what I mean", Phil replied. "They pay the rent".

He was being as vague as possible with Sekiyama, in an attempt to save face. Phil was trying to get out of the corner he had backed himself into, but he wanted to do it without retracting any statements he had made. True or false, he wanted to avoid discussing the subject in detail with his Japanese client. He believed that in this case he could come out of this meeting smelling like a rose if he just took the wheel and got in the drivers seat. If he admitted a mistake, that would open him up for even more extreme

scrutiny. He had been taught not to admit being wrong or anything else in this type of business case. In fact within reason, brash, assertive action was usually the order of the day.

If you give them an inch, they'll take a mile. Cause if it's not what you smoke that they don't like, then it's your music or your religion or your nose or your skin. It's a damn shame when anyone uses these kinds of things to deprive someone of life or liberty. Their strongest admonition should be do not do it and unless we were doing something else then we pose no threat to them and we have the right to resist any way we want. They may win, but we have done what we believed was right. We should not be a threat to anyone and should try not to go out like ranch apocalypse. We should not threaten law enforcement, because like everyone else sometimes they "no not what they do".

"They just know how to change this place by killing everyone in the human race ... they'll even kill you for a cigarette ... that's Sting or the Police", said Phil.

"I don't know if that's exactly what they said?", he said reconsidering.

"Mom, I think you should acknowledge that there is a God and if you think about it you'll see that it's as logical as the stars in the sky. There is a rhyme and reason to it and we just aren't significant enough to be privy to the nuts and bolts of it all. When your loved ones died and you questioned God, you were normal. You were justified in asking God for justice for the ones that departed far too soon. God may have already granted more justice than we can imagine in his grand design. He usually doesn't tell us personally that those loved ones are probably in a much better place than this world. If we ask him though, he will tell us the truth about these things. One of the things he does not like, is for us to think that we don't need him. We need to think about that and then ask him to forgive and save us.

"So you need to win a few trophies to stop being insecure about yourself. You need something on the mantle to prove your own self worth, because even you don't believe in it", Vaughn provoked..

"Hah!", Phil replied defensively. "How can you bellyache about a little insignificant thing like me wanting to compete in over 35's tennis matches."

"I deplore and don't believe in all the superiority myths and legends that you perpetuated about your race. Equally I don't for a minute believe of the racial and ethnic stereotypes you use to slander others", Phil retorted.

Vaughn cracked a rare smile, "does that mean that all the stereotypes about me are baloney too?"

Phil was at a loss for words momentarily, "let's just forget it and try to get along with each other, after all we are supposed to be partners."

They drove on through the night in silence, the car's tires kicking up a steady spray on the rain drenched highway. The windshield wipers kept time like a slow motion metronome as they flicked across the windshield every few seconds.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere Phil heard a loud siren blast and simultaneously saw the red and blue lights of a police car in his rear view mirror.

"Shit!", he yelled.

"How fast are you going?", Vaughn queried.

"Seventy-four, but why didn't the radar detector go off?", Phil asked.

"Must be one of those new K-band radar's, you'd better pull over", Vaughn said with little concern. He would not be paying this ticket.

Phil pressed his turn signal and started a gradual pullover to the right shoulder. He debated about what to do with the contraband. Ordinarily he would eat it, but with Vaughn in the car he decided not to. It was well hidden and would be hard to get too and if he did dispose of it, Vaughn would see him and his secret would be out. This time he would leave it in his most secret hiding place and hope for the best.

The siren stopped finally as the police car stopped behind Phil's now parked car. A lanky young state trooper approached the car, his flashlight out and his other hand on his holster.

"Get out of the car and produce your drivers license!", he commanded.

Phil obliged his request, moving slowly so he would not risk spooking the officer.

"Good evening sir", Phil said politely.

"I clocked you going 75 miles per hour", the officer stated. "That's a \$150 fine in this state!"

"I'm sorry officer, I didn't realize I was going so fast", Phil addressed the trooper as officer this time, he wanted to slip in as many appropriate titles and buzzwords as possible.

The trooper examined the license and then asked for Phil's registration and insurance papers.

From the police car another trooper approached, he had two german shepherds on leashes. One was a big boisterous male and the other a serious female. Both were trained to sniff drugs and they grew excited as they approached the Chevy.

"Put Rosey back", the first trooper ordered his partner. "I want Duke to handle this one."

The second trooper followed his orders and put the whining Rosey back in the car. It was a good thing for Phil, since she had already found the scent. Duke on the other hand had not.

"What's the matter officer?", Vaughn asked.

"This is routine for friday night", we have the authority to check any car that we feel gives us probable cause for suspicion.

Phil was scared, but hoped that his hiding place would conceal the odor that the dog was trained to search out. After all, there were other odors in his underwear that might just outweigh the dog's primary scent.

Duke snooped around, he came up to Phil and sniffed, but fortunately he was confused by the conflicting odors emanating from Phil's croch. To Duke, male croches were interesting, but females of the human variety were much more intriguing. He left Phil after a few seconds and jumped in the back seat of the car.

"This is ridiculous", Phil protested, now that he felt he was off the hook.

Vaughn, always the champion of law and order was not upset.

"I'm glad to see you troopers are on the ball!", he said enthusiastically. "It's guys like you that this country should be proudest of, trying to get the riff raff and scum off the streets."

"Okay you two, you can go and I'm just going to give you a warning this time, but you'd better slow down!", the trooper returned Phil's license and other papers and tipped his cowboy hat.

Back in the squad car Rosey barked, she was more interested in male croches than Duke and knew that her quarry was getting away.

"Shut up Rosey!", the second officer said as he loaded Duke into the back seat with her.

Later on back in his dank, dismal basement apartment, Phil meditated on his lucky break. He microwaved some nachos and thought about how lucky he was not to have to share the steaming snack with the kids or Sharon.

"No one to steal my nachos!", he triumphantly gloated. Then remembering his once happy family and home he broke down and sobbed.

The radio blarred as usual in the background and he heard the words as he sat on the cold basement floor with his head in his hands, crying.

"Mama it was too late, it's too late, it's gone to far ... she's come undone, doh, de, doh, doh... too many churches and not enough truth."

A few songs earlier he had been listening as another song blasted religion, killing is killing no matter who's name it's in the singer had crooned.

Now he articulated what he felt that day, "religion is bunk", he pounded out on the keyboard.

God is not bunk and God is a whole lot more than a scientific or mathematical model or theory. God is everything and always and God is conscience and in control of the universe. We're just so set on the "absolute truth" of our versions of the details and specifics that we justify genocide and murder on a routine basis. We run our nations like corporations and behind the masks of charity and good intentions, we squash the competition like greedy robber barons and pirates. The problem is that on the world stage the competitive companies are nations, tribes, clans and they are about as Machiavelian as we are. The country with the best "sales force" or more commonly the most powerful military wins the war. We arm ourselves to the teeth as best we can, because of our basic fear and distrust of our unfamiliar neighbors. For the last thousand years the west has played this game more seriously than any other part of the world.

A man's expectations of his woman are generally unrealistic, just as her's are of him. He ideally wants a woman who will satisfy his every sexual desire, take care of his kids and home, remain beautiful forever and do what he wants her to do. She ideally wants him to desire only her forever, support her and her children in as lavish a lifestyle as possible, be romantic forever, look decent, put her on a pedestal and do what she wants him to do.

"Keep your fingers out of the door and your butt out of the road!", Phil admonished the children.

"You say you're not willing to hand over the reigns of power to the good old girls any more then you're willing to voluntarily submit to the good old boys", Sharan asked. "What about if the good old girls govern better and don't as you say `oppress' you, then will you be more for them?"

"Sure, I'm for anyone that can effectively govern without crushing individual rights, spirit and initiative. I'm not real thrilled about being on the outside of the law. If I had my druthers, I wouldn't be, but society makes the laws not guys like me", Phil answered.

"I don't believe that you should imprison a person for a non-violent crime, if that person is very likely to be the victim of a violent crime in your jail. If you do, you're worse than your prisoner", he finished.

"Well, number one", said Sharon, "your idea of a non-violent crime and mine are probably different and number two, the government has better things to do than make prisons like day camp."

"I was afraid you'd say that", Phil said, sadly shaking his head.

"Is it self-centered or is it right, to keep a thought to yourself, even if you think that spreading that thought might do a lot of good, but you're afraid that you or yours might be harmed for speaking out? Or is it your responsibility to shared it with as many people as you can, in order to try and do some good?", Phil asked.

His imagination hesitated, "I think that unless God tell's you to share it, you have no responsibility to speak out and you are correct to do what you think will protect your loved ones. In fact what you feel compelled to say may be against God, since it is from your mind and not his, so you should be content to live a quiet life. It sounds to me that you would speak out as much for fame and fortune as any other reason and that is a no no."

"Yes, well I'll think about it", Phil replied, abscentmindedly.

MY ROBOT WEARS GLASSES

"Let's play robot", Sally said. They had played once before and she remembered to bring the remote control, by which she controlled his actions.

"Turn me on", Phil joked.

Sally took the remote control, pointed it at her father and made a beeping sound.

"Beep, your on channel 5", she laughed, that means your my robot.

"Yes master", Phil replied.

They went through the game, her the boss sometimes and him at other times, like when she had to clean her room. Phil pictured himself as a robot nanny who had to attend to the needs of the four year old, protect her and make sure she did her lessons and chores. Kind of a high tech tutor of the future.

"Hey robot!", Sally said.

"What", Phil replied.

"This is a store, we're playing store", she told him.

"First you have to clean your room master", he replied.

After a little give and take and a reminder that the robot had been programmed to make sure she cleans her room or else, Sally cleaned her room efficiently.

"Look robot I'm done", she said by and by.

"Let me put my glasses on and see how it looks", Phil said.

"Robots don't see very well without their glasses on."

They entered brother Joey's room and she talked to him.

"Hi robot, look what I bought, binoculars and a hat", Sally showed him her toys.

Phil wasn't paying much attention, he was surveying the ruins that passed for Joey's room.

"Here robot!", Sally said trying to recapture his attention. "Take my binoculars, you might need them to see me."

She walked into Joeys closet and partially closed the door behind herself. Meanwhile Phil walked over the bed where Joey and Al were looking at a Boyslife magazine's back cover ad, savoring over the prizes they could win if they sold enough items.

"You need to clean your room", he said in his robot voice.

"I will", Joey replied non-chalantly.

Phil had learned that "I will", in this tone of voice meant that Joey would probably not get around to cleaning his room this century.

Phil approached Joey and Al like Frankenstein's monster, his hands stretched out in a choke grip.

"You will clean your room now", he said getting slowly closer and closer.

"Dad, stop!", Joey laughed, Al laughed too.

"You'd better get Sally to change my channel, it's too bad she's locked in the closet", Phil jeered.

"Pasta la vista baby!", he said moving so close that he was touching the boys neck.

The boys chuckled and Joey raised his hand-me-down cordless phone, pushing a few buttons he neutralized his robotized father.

Just then the little "master" emerged smiling from the closet. "Flush, flush, flush", went the battery operated toy baby potty as she repeatedly pressed the handle down.

Phil decided to offer his services as lead singer to Saigon Kick when he heard on the radio that they were looking for a lead singer.

Despite having no experience, he'd tell them that he'd been the lead singer with Hard Dregs back in the 80's and a drummer with that Eddy Wilson guy before that in the 1970's.

After all he had gotten his start in Stillwater, Oklahoma, the same town that Garth Brooks started in. If saying that he got started playing rock and roll in the same town Garth Brooks didn't give him a measure of credibility, then nothing would. Of course Saigon Kick would have to work around his schedule.

Phil respected David Koresh for going out with a bang in defense of his beliefs, but didn't think it was the best thing to do most of the time and certainly not the best thing to do with children's lives involved.

"I used to", Phil said in reply to Joey's question, hoping that he wouldn't be asked for a more specific reply.

He would not be so lucky, Joey looked him straight in the eye, "but do you still do it?"

"That's personal, Joey", he said. This was another planned attempt to put off the question, but it was no more successful than the last one.

"Dad, please tell me!", Joey persisted. "Do you still do it?"

Phil had given a lot of thought to how he would answer this inevitable question, once all his subterfuges had been used up. He had hoped it would not come up so soon though and agreed with Sharon's premise that it should be put off as long as possible. She believed that the kids might be quizzed at school about such things and that harm could come of its exposure.

Phil agreed in part, but also believed that this veil of silence was just what the forces of evil wanted. How much easier it was to keep freedom of choice in the matter away from the people if they were afraid to even talk about it.

He was however tired of the charade and had already blatantly lied to the boy about it two years ago, when he had been similarly caught in the act. It was harder to lie to the children than it was to lie at work to make money. The pangs of guilty conscience related to lying at work had been commensurate with how much he was paid to do his dirty deeds.

When he did it dirt cheap, lying to companies and individuals seemed to bother him more than when he was being handsomely rewarded.

"Dad!", Joey demanded of him. "Tell me."

"Okay, I'll tell you", he had considered using subterfuge number three and tell him that it was none of his business, but he would not use that on his child this day.

"Yes, I still do", he said.

The boy's eyes narrowed and he looked at his father as if he were the worst betrayer on earth.

Phil waited for the next barrage, not knowing what to expect. He just knew that there were some things he'd like to add, but didn't know if this was the time or place.

THE TIME AND PLACE

One thing he wanted to say was that he hoped that Joey wouldn't do it, because it was likely to make him concentrate on school even less than he did now, kind of like the opposite of ridding. It seemed like a way of inducing A.D.D., it forced the mind to consider things that it normally took for granted or to go off on tangents that made one view reality a little differently. This scared people who were so wrapped up in the rat race, flags and the self-aggrandizing, ethnocentric bull shit of the world. They freaked when confronted with the track record of the culture and values that they so vehemently defended. Be it western culture and its barbarism during the crusades, hundred years war, holocaust, Indian wars and elsewhere or Eastern society with its similarly bloody past, the powers to be didn't want the people to relax a little and live and let live. It was much more to their benefit to keep the pions on the treadmill, clenching their teeth, shaking their fists and poisoning their children's minds.

"I'm just sorry that you're so angry and upset all the time", Phil told Sharon.

"Oh! you're so full of it. If you cared, you'd stop doing what you do", she verbally counter punched.

There's been a battle of the sexes going on since who knows when and neither side have been angels. Now for women to tell men that they have to unilaterally change is nuts and men are crazy to do it unless women change in all the ways that we have always wanted them to change.

Liberation for women of the things they think have enslaved them applies to men too. We should give them all the liberation they want and in turn become as completely liberated from the things we consider to enslave us.

Liberate everyone, liberate yourself, but don't de-liberate me.

Stop the killing and end the revenge cycle.

"I don't abuse it", Phil said.

"I use it for one of it's natural purposes, you're just mad cause you want to control other people and that means they can only do things for your purposes.

"Vaughn, you are insane!", Phil protested.

"I'll get you!", Vaughn snarled.

"Go ahead be insane, I don't have problem with you being insane. Not unless you're in charge, in power or in control. Too bad people just like you are."

"It's clear that neither one of you like or approve of me", Phil said clearing his rusty throat. "But you know what, I no longer give a damn, your low down bitching's got my poor feet a-itching."

The two women looked at him, scrutinizing his every feature, they more than didn't like him, they found him abhorrent and at least one of them fantasized about of killing him.

Before either of them could speak he continued his argument.

"We'd have to be crazy to stay together", he said to Sharon.

"No I'd have to be insane to stay with you!", she angrily railed.

Phil turned to the other woman, "you know she think's I'm the antichrist or possessed or something, what am I supposed to do? It's not like she's number one in my life anymore, if she ever was."

By now Sharon was incensed and she was looking for something to throw, she was also crying and screamdng. "I can't believe how badly you've let me and the kids down. The only number one in your life is smoking and yourself!"

"I was thinking that the kids were number one, but you're probably right, I don't know what's in my heart", he was toneing down, and suddenly didn't want to fight anymore.

Sharon on the other hand was just getting warmed up, "you pig, do you want these kids to follow in your footsteps?"

"Since you know everything about good and bad morals, I guess I should say no", he said. He didn't want them to follow in his footsteps in the bad ways, but he didn't think it would be so bad for them to have a streak or two of his.

Sharon on the other hand just wanted him to die and go burn in hell like she always implied he would.

Phil really did give a damn about their relationship though and wanted to save it. He was tempted not to give a damn anymore, but he was pretty sure that would be bad for the kids and maybe for him too. He had no idea if it would be good or bad for Sharon, he didn't understand her well enough to know.

He did know that he had things he didn't want to spread to the general public like he might if he were single again. As far as true love, that was something he truly believed he was capable of but he didn't know how it applied to Sharon. Maybe he had been in true love with her at the beginning, maybe he still was, he didn't know. It wasn't that easy, after all he felt like she was blaming, accusing and threatening him constantly.

Her love seemed as fickle as the wind and as conditional as hell. Did this mean that she didn't really love him? One thing he knew was that they were wired differently and they had different outlooks on every fucking thing in the world. Whose outlook was right? She might claim that hers was Biblical and his un-Biblical and most people who would side with her. She was also human however and he would never voluntarily accept her side's version of things, which he considered a white-washed version.

She had a meanness to him that that flared to the surface regularly and they seemingly also had irreconcilable differences of religious, moral and social values. He sometimes hated her as much as she seemed to hate him, but he wrote it down in his journal instead of speaking it to her. The hate had always passed eventually though and he never contemplated doing anything to her, not till now. On this day Phil was over the edge and he was wishing harm on her.

First he considered praying for her to get hit by a truck or at least die in her sleep. It was at this point that he normally "returned to his senses" and tried to placate her.

"Honey, I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything I said, I know I'm crazy enough to stay with you forever, I wish you felt the same about me."

Sharon was not buying his "pack of lies" and continued her tirade. "You're a liar! She felt shackled by her belief that it's a sin to divorce your spouse except in cases of adultery. Secretly she hoped he do it and get caught, then she could with clear conscience leave him. She hoped it would happen soon so that she could get on with her life while she was still young. She knew she could do just great without him. the possibilities were endless, if only he would just get out of their lives.

"I'm as tired of this marriage you are, if not more why don't you just leave", she hoped he would take the first step and then the onus would not be on her.

Phil saw things quite differently of course, he would not leave his home and children until the police dragged him away, maybe kicking and screaming. This was not what Sharon wanted, if he would not behave himself, she hoped that he'd at least not make a scene on that hypothetical future day when he would be forced to get out of their lives.

That's wherein the problem lied, she wanted him out of her and the kids lives. He didn't want to be out of their lives, although he cared less about being in her life than he had in the past. In his opinion she was a bad wife, always complaining and bitching. She saw it way different, she saw herself as living in a living hell as a result of Phil. He had no right to pollute the kids lives with his miserable existence. Phil believed that come hell or high water he had a right to be there for the kids on his terms, not hers.

"You've got no rights to anything as long as you're breaking the law!", she yelled.

It was clear, they would never resolve anything, their differences were irreconcilable. She would just go on hoping for him to die and vice versa. Little did she know however that he was hatching a plot to help speed up her demise. Sharon was similarly already actively scheming to get him thrown in jail and out of her life.

She decides to have a private detective follow him, she never catches him with any other women, but the private eye does catch him taking field stones from a newly graded subdivision and set's up a sting.

"I'm sorry your're disappointed and disgusted, but I'm not sorry that I'm the one disappointing and disgusting to you.

I think that you might be the one that's been pulled into satins snare, not me, or at least you're right in their with me.

Yes I'm a screwup or sinner as you put it, but I still have enough questions about the Bible as to not let you run my life according to you or anyone elses views from it.

"You don't have any right to even question anything about that great book, much less have any opinions of your own about God.

"I may have no right to question it, but I may instead have the right and the responsibility. In any case I'm not going to voluntarily give anyone the right to play God to me, God I'm sure can do that and he aint playing games like religionists are.

"I think you wanted a man that you could mold into the perfect husband and father that you could make.

"I'm not sorry that I'm resisting that impulse of yours",

"There's been a battle of the sexes going on since Adam and Eve and now you're demanding that I surrender to you. I've already been stupid enough to unilaterally disarm myself, but now I'm gonna stop it"

"In Robotworld, control over your own body, often included the control over your cloned bodies. This of course led to a myriad of controversial issues.

"You are determined to save my soul if it kills us both, thank you but you can stop trying, I'll take responsibility for myself.

"I don't give a damn about your soul anymore", she spat back

Maybe she never had, her love had always been rather conditional it seemed. Bow down to her and her ways, wants and desires and she would put up with you otherwise she'd despise you

"Just like you've never given a damn about mine", she went on.

If you don't like the way I'm living you can kiss my ass, go fuck yourself and go to hell", he said.

"Well you've got one thing right", the other man said. "You are going to hell!"

The hate they had for each other was unfortunate and it was also real as hell. They had so much in common, that they could have been brothers, but the world had them so turned around that they were quite willing to kill each other.

The first one spoke again,

"Just want to tell you about this daydream", Phil told her.

"In it, we've died and gone to heaven and both of us have resurrection bodies, that look like our bodies during our prime, except that you have bigger boobs and a nicer butt. I have bigger muscles and a slightly different nose."

Sharon was at first angry, after all anger was her first reaction to damn near everything.

"What you don't like my butt and you want me to have bigger boobs! That's all you care about is using me for sex!", she was as usual fit to be tied.

"Actually you're not even much good for that", Phil said thinking selfishly. "But I'm trying to think of a way that I could handle spending eternity with you and I think that would do it"

"You'll spend eternity in hell", Vaughn said bursting into Phil's office unannounced.

Sharon looked at Vaughn and then lit into Phil, "I don't plan on spending a split second with you. I hope I never see you again and believe me, you'll be hearing from my lawyer!"

"Jesus!", Phil sighed loudly. "I was trying to be nice to her and look what happens."

Vaughn by now had taken the seat that Sharon had just so quickly ejected herself from.

"You have a strange way of being nice", Vaughn said. He hated his partner most of the time, but still they had to work together.

"Yeah, I guess that was a stupid thing to tell her. Actually I doubt if I could stand being with her forever even if they did all that to her. I'm just too turned on by every sweet little thing I see out there."

"Well then you might as well cut her loose now and let her get on with her life, after all if you couldn't even love her with those improvements, you sure won't love her when she gets old and wrinkled."

"Get's old and wrinkled", thought Phil to himself. "She's already a bag lady."

"You've got a fine woman there", Vaughn counseled. "You should be grateful as hell."

"Yeah, I'm grateful", Phil said sarcastically. "Grateful as hell!"

"Jeez!", Vaughn interrupted "You're every bit as selfish as I thought you were. After all she's done for you, you should worship the ground she walks on."

"Why don't you just get a divorce, it's obvious that you hate each other?", Vaughn recommended.

"There's not a woman on earth that could keep me satisfied", Phil told Sharon.

She blinked, her heart saddened by this harsh insult, but Phil had not finished.

"Not a woman on earth, except you", he said in the same breath.

Sharon's spirit brightened instantly, but then she realized it was probably not true. Phil was too big a jerk to mean it, she thought, "he's just trying to butter me up."

Phil was thinking about the young girlfriend of his renter and her black hairy armpits, which he had just seen this morning, it had been a turnon, one which he could never tell Sharon about without severe repercussions. He wondered if Sharon's would look the same if she also went unshaven for a few days. As he had peered into the car at her, he had also seen a blonde, few days growth on her inner thighs as she sat there in the Camaro.

"Well thank you if you mean it", Sharon finally replied.

"I do", Phil said, knowing that he did despite this morning's temptation.

"Is God always fair?", Phil asked the Sunday school teacher.

"I plead the fifth", Phil told her.

"Well that's a strange question to plead the fifth to", she said.

"That's right in order to get the most out of the Fifth Amendment, I have to use it strategically even for questions that I could answer, otherwise you'd know that it's covering a yes answer everytime."

"Well, I'll still know what your answer is everytime you use it, even when you're trying to hide something", Sharon asserted. She was always `asserting' herself one way or another and God help anyone that got in her way.

"That's fine with, I'll just put a sign on my face that says I plead the Fifth and I won't have to talk to you at all anymore", Phil replied cockily.

"Good", Sharon spat back, "you never listen to anyone anyway, just the demons in your head from your you know what."

That was it, he didn't want to discuss it anymore and tried to weasel away. "Jeez, why do you have to bring religion into everything?"

"Because it's in everything, you can't separate it from life even if you want to", she lectured.

"Hell", Phil said as he rose out of his chair to leave. "God is Great, religion is bunk and I'm gonna go get a Three Stooges movie to watch, do you want anything?"

Sharon stood watching, angry as a hornet as usual, as the man that she hated and loved walked out to his truck.

Phil got into the old truck and fired her up. "I'm not gonna let anyone tell me what to do, no one's gonna rule my life and she sure as hell isn't", he talked to himself as he less carefully than usual backed out of the driveway.

He drove on thingk "I'm not gonna worship her or her set of rules, I'm just gonna worship you God."

"I know I'm probably being stupid about this but I can't help being skeptical about the church and the Bible. I know it's got more wisdom than any man could have, but tell me Lord is every single thing in it true like they say or is there something else we should know.

"I'm not wanting to dispute any of it, because I believe that you're out there and you can do any darn thing you want to. But please be merciful. Like with this smoking thing, why can't you just let them fine or throw a man in jail with only bread and water and leave out the rapist and murderers. I know it's up to you what society does unless they are not in line with you, so please dear God make them have mercy.

Phil finished his prayer and wondered if God was listening and if he heard and if God in his heart of hearts make this a kinder, gentler world. Of course his tribulations might not have even begun yet, so Phil wondered if he was putting the cart in front of the horse, or worse being impudent in even asking such a favor of the creator.

"I believe that we need God's intervention to save the human race, and I used to believe that you're the way Jesus, but I've changed my mind due to new information. I still don't want to be agnostic or a doubting Thomas, but I have to admit that at times I'm both of those things, as well as a liar and a cheat and an ...", Phil finished and was interrupted.

He was about to admit to lusting in the mind, which he did almost continuously, but Sharon walked in.

"Where've you been?", she asked.

"I'm leaving", he said matter of factly and quickly walked out of the house. As soon as he was on friendlier ground his line of thought returned. "God, why do you surround me with beautiful young women, how can you expect me not to lust in my mind, if not in the flesh."

Sharon had reached forty and though still a great looking dame, the word dame fit Phil's outlook on life today. Sharon was getting to the point where she could not compete in looks with women half her age, despite her efforts to stay as perky as them. Sharon devoted much time to the impossible dream of youthfulness, but in her mind it was not a battle against nature, it was just a natural response.

Despite what some people wanted to believe, Phil believed that men would always be attracted to certain types of women and vice versa. The types may have changed a little or even a lot, as the politically correct might state. He didn't know much about that, but he felt sure that most of the men in his family had always liked young and beautiful and they always would. Nature was cruel in this matter, but all the libbers in the world couldn't change human nature, not unless they tampered with nature itself. Of course such tampering was becoming more of a reality everyday, along with the number of people who had no qualms about doing it as long as it was done "the right way", their way.

He had to tell her how he felt and he spun on his heels and re-entered the house to do it. "I want you to get out of this marriage while you're young and can start a new life easily. If you wait too long, you're going to be older and like it or not it might be tougher".

Sharon was shocked, "what are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you wanting me to be accountable to you. If that's what you want, then we might as well just end it.

I've been under your thumb for twenty years and I'm not going to put up with it for a second more. I don't want to be chained to anyone or anything, not even if the chains are made of silver."

"Your crazy", she said. He just stared back.

"Good", Sharon finally said. "Why don't you pack your fucking bags and leave, that's the best thing for everyone!"

Phil smirked back, "not so fast, if you want me out you'll have to throw me out. I'm not out of here till the sheriff's boys throw me out." He felt he was safe, because she probably wouldn't divorce him unless he was unfaithful.

"Well don't you worry, because I'll have that court order anyday now, I've been working on it for a month."

Phil didn't know whether she was serious or not, but his face still turned red.

"You took those vows, but I guess you never meant them", she accused him.

"I took them all right, but God knows, I didn't know what I was in for", he defended. "Too much of my life has been wasted worrying about towing your line, so that you don't flip out on me and threaten to take the children away from me. You can save that for somebody else, cause I'm not letting you intimidate me anymore, I don't care what threats you make or carry out, it's not worth going through life, as a slave to someone else whose got you by the throat."

"That's your fault, not mine", Sharon reminded him.

He was leaning back and suddenly Phil's chair shot out from under him. "Zoom, whack!", the back of the chair hit the ground, Phil along with it. He smiled, what luck, his left hand had caught the ground at the moment of impact and his left arm was hung up on the little trash can next to the chair. He hadn't fallen out of a chair like that in thirty years and it felt great. It felt great because he was unscathed. The walls and floor in his cramped basement office were bare concrete, so he could have cracked his skull if he had hit head first. The chair had wheels, which propelled it extremely fast and he was amazed at his luck, if that was what it was.

Phil could now identify with Joey, who had done this a couple times over the last few years at elementary school. The same time period in which Phil had last had such an accident. This wasn't to say that Phil hadn't smacked his skull on anything over the years, he had. The most memorable time was when he was outside a bar that he had just started working at as a doorman. He had worked a couple nights ago and now it was his night off.

Walking out the front door of the bar, Phil had leaned back where he thought there was a brick wall. He was planning on leaning on the non-existent wall, so when his head fell six feet and hit the concrete sidewalk, there was a lot of force hitting his head. Having only worked there once, Phil obviously had not learned the layout of the building, as well as he had so drunkenly thought. Some bystanders, or co-workers, he couldn't remember which, had helped him to his car, where he hoped he remembered sleeping it off.

Phil looked up to see if Sharon was smiling at his close scrape, but she still had the same angry expression.

"Well stupid, you can't even sit in a chair, much less carry on a successful marriage."

"Is it any wonder we unsuccessful, I can't open my mouth to you. Everytime I try, you attack me for being morally depraved, or a mental midget. You give your love so conditionally and any encouragement you give is carefully calculated to give you a certain result", he was still on the offensive.

"My only condition is that you do what's best for the kids", she defended herself.

"Yeah, what's best for the kids, in your mind, that's the only what's best you care about", they argued on and on.

Phil looked at the woman on his bed and wondered how he had got so lucky. Sharon was sitting on the edge of the bed and was still fully clothed. She was an incredible vision of beauty, intelligence and other things.

"I'm sorry we're fighting", he told her, then he expressed his feelings. "Sometimes, like right now, I look at you and just wondered how I got so lucky."

Sharon sat there on the bed still, she had already gotten over the fight a few seconds before he even spoke, so she was not angry anymore anyway. The compliment would be taken graciously, even though she didn't know if he really meant it.

Phil knew he meant it and smiled, it didn't matter though, what else are you supposed to do when you think of a line like that. A line you may have never heard before, but that had been used for a million years, in a million places and worked a million times.

An old person's life is everybit as valuable as a young person's or a fetus and vice versa. That means we should not aid and abet abortion or euthanasia, if the individual wants one of these and wants to deal with their conscience and God, let them find a way to do the killing themselves, without any aid from society. The family, meaning mostly mothers for fetuses and all kinds of family for old people should not aid and abet their own the death, the death of their fetus or of the infirm. This does not mean that life support needs to be used, but measures intended to hasten the death or prevent the birth of a human being are wrong.

"I may be doing something you want me to be ashamed of, but I'm not doing anything that I'm ashamed of", he replied.

"Oh, I know, you're proud of it!", she retorted indignantly.

"That's your opinion", he said straight back. "All I know is that I'm not bound by your biased morals and values, I'll stick to my biased morals and values."

She was getting angry again and spouted off tirade of threats and accusations, which in total amounted to do things this way or else. Blackmail was what it was, since she had Sheriff John on her side.

"Show mercy anytime you get the opportunity", the words flashed into Phil's head. "Because to do so you must be the powerful one in the encounter, just like God will be when you meet up with him."

Phil remembered that Jesus had said something to the effect that the two greatest commandments were number one; love God above all else and number two love your brother as you love yourself. Jesus had

also said don't worry about the speck in your brothers eye while ignoring the wooden plank in your own eye. One last thing Jesus had said that Phil thought summed it all up was let the one among you without guilt throw the first stone. So much for them having the right to spill innocent blood, because of their high and mighty values. He later had learned that the Golden rule was probably spoken by Confucius hundreds of years before Jesus supposedly said it.

"There's might always have been a race war going on, there sure seems to be one going on now, declared or not. Just like there's maybe always been a battle of the sexes waging. That's another one that though undeclared by some people of each sex, they are unilateral in their observance of peace and are therefore paying a high price. There are also all degrees of one having declared war or declared peace. I've never met anyone who is not in some degree of fear or conflict with the opposite, despite their protests to the contrary.

None of us are completely part of the solution or part of the problem, and only God knows for sure which is which. So declare peace on everyone as best you can, teach everyone liberation, but teach that liberation of some should not mean deliberation for others. Be kindest to the people out there who are the most different from you. Don't pander or give away the farm, but go out of your way to be kind to them in times of peace, because such kindnesses may sow the seeds to save everyone when the cycle of race war heats up. It's been demonstrated that in race and ethnic wars, there has been less mercy than in family feuds like the north and south in the civil war. That doesn't mean it's not worth going the extra mile to get along with your ethnic opposite, it shows that maybe getting along hasn't been tried enough. We can all make it work, by deciding not to kill or hurt anyone period, except in the most direct self defense.. This is better than saying I won't hurt someone because they're black or white or red or yellow or brown.

He was the type that would be happy to have an exact record of Phil's daily schedule. With that he could criticize Phil's every action of the day as too slow, too selfish, immoral or just plain stupid. Vaughn was like that, his relationship with Phil was blood and guts adversarial. If he couldn't work Phil like a beast of burden and get a good return on him as an investment for his own purpose, then he'd as soon destroy him by trying.

Phil was once again driving down the Garden State Parkway smoking a cigarette. He had been in Manhattan all day and had not had one since the morning rush hour on his way to the office.

it seemed to him that the scenery looked more three-dimensional after he smoked. The trees stood out like individuals, the surrounding cars and drivers had personality and depth, not like the two-dimensional quality that the daily rat race made them assume ordinarily. Trite as this would sound to the

Phil held the cigarette up to his nose and took another drag. He had heard that the nose was like a filter, so he used it instead of his mouth. He figured his heart and lungs might last a bit longer if he filtered the smoke. through his rather large nose.

The same contempt you hold me in, I hold you in, that makes us an even number.

"Well at least she thinks I work a forty hour week", Phil thought to himself after seeing her list of what she contributed to the family, versus what he contributed.

There were only four or five things she had on his list, although she had been kind enough to tell him to fill it out the rest of the way. For her part, she had a grand list, about twenty-five things that she contributed to the family. It was staggering all that she did and what a worthless lump he had become.

There were certainly a few valid points on it Phil thought, but in general Sharon-of-Arc was bending over backwards to pat herself on the back. Overall it was an insensitive ,insult by an ingrate, but then this was the nineties and strong women were still king over weak men. There was only one thing he should tell her about her list and that was where to stick it.

"You just don't get it she said, "I just want you to show a little appreciation, that's all, I'm not asking you to kiss my ass."

"You keep score too much and of the wrong things. If you think that I can appreciate you when you are constantly accusing me of being scum and threatening to leave me and take the kids then you crazy. You're list isn't about being appreciated, it's about control over me", Phil angrily retorted.

"Oh! Don't give me that, I've never threatened that", Sharon's memory was not very good.

"You've mentioned it just, enough times to keep me `in line', and you've implied it a hundred other times." He was sick of this absolutely loveless marriage. It was based on nothing other than financial convenience and the belief that a bad marriage is better for kids than a divorce. She attached so many conditions to her love that it was impossible for Phil to win it and certainly not worth the bother anymore.

"Well as usual you're boring me with your winey puss, chickenshit nonsense. As for me wanting to control you, that's that last thing on earth I'd want. There's a difference between wanting to control someone and wanting to be shown the courtesy of a little appreciation. If you can't see that, then it's just another one of your problems", Sharon eloquently defended herself.

Phil suddenly seemed to capitulate, "you're right dear, I should appreciate you more, I hope that I'm lucky enough to be married to you for a century."

Sharon eyed him suspiciously, not saying anything. "I just can't wait for this century to end, what are there five more years?", he said mockingly.

"I got myself into this", Phil said to Joey. "And now I've got to pay the price for bucking the system. If I get screwed by someone while I'm in there, then I get screwed. I knew that they do that to you and society can't or won't stop it, that's the price I'll have to pay for disobeying them. My only comfort is something that Jesus was supposed to have said."

Joey looked at his father and felt sick, he kept waiting for Phil to wink, but he never did, he was just smiling weakly.

"I don't know anything Joey, I don't know shit from shineola.

"You're gonna have to make you own decisions and take care of yourself.

"I don't know if there's a God or a Jesus, but I think there is. I don't know if evolution is right or wrong, although I tend to believe in it as a theory that doesn't disprove God. If it's true I think it's probably completely under the supreme good being's control and direction. But I have my many moments of

doubt when I don't even believe that, then I think it's all some random, statistical, mathematically contrived equation.

I agree with the Senator from Indiana on abortion, he seems wise.

Phil stood in line at the gun store to buy a can of mace for Sharon. In a case in front of where he stood were several machine guns, including an UZI and a MAC 10. Phil and the man behind him examined the \$12.99 and the \$16.95 sizes trying and noticed that one said pepper spray. The other can listed the ingredients captim ocelana or something like that.

"Can I help you?", the clerk asked.

"Yes, I'll have a can of mace and an UZI", Phil said absentmindedly.

Phil heard the screech of the school bus brakes, it was time to stop. He put his things away and went up stairs to open the door for Joey.

"There're two principals here", Phil suggested. "One is that Jesus is God. The second is that I'm not going to shove that down your throat. That's because there are already too many laws. We need to get back to just the original ten and still remember that we should temper the eye for an eye of the old testament with the mercy and forgiveness that Jesus was capable of."

"Women are like a drug, they have a narcotic effect on men, and they make them do things they would otherwise not do, see Adam and Eve for an early reference. Women want to be the only drug available to men, see the womens temperance movement which achieved prohibition not too long after women achieved the vote. See how women want to disarm men, not just criminals, but all men, since they see men as basically needing to be controlled. See how men have let women and minorities rob them of control, see how men have been instrumental in liberating women and enslaving their brothers. See how these forces of evil want to unilaterally disarm men so that they will be easier to control, see how once the working man gives up his weapon, he becomes a subject of the state and no longer a citizen. See how women have an agenda that is every bit as corrupt, sinful and self centered as do men. See how women are ruled by their emotions and hormones and God know'w what else. See how women and those on welfare have greater numbers then men for voting, see how this means that we have handed our destiny over to those who are not meant to lead us. See how blacks commit 1,000 times more rapes against whites then whites commit against blacks, see how blacks commits 100 times more violent crime against whites than whites commit against blacks. See how satan working through women and welfare people want to disarm working men, so they will be enslaved. See how this is coming to pass, see spot run.

"You're good enough for me now and you'll be good enough for me later, I've taken those vows and I plan on keeping them, but their wasn't anything in them about you making the law, so stop telling me what to do.

"According to the Bible, which you say is God's absolute word, you are my helpmate and are not to have authority over me. So you'd better watch yourself, or I'll write you up for insubordination", Phil lashed out.

Saw a profile today of Paul Warfield. After doing some calcuations I figured he was fifty-one. My I thought, that's like hard to believe, he and I are both getting up there a little bit.

"Arfy scared", she said.

"Arfy scared of what?", Phil asked.

"Arfy scared of imagination", Sally said sweetly in her mock baby talk voice, betraying a little humor in her voice.

"I think everyone out there knows what going to happen, or at least they could if they read the Book of Revelation. If people would only admit it, they would say they know that things are out of control. I think we may have an instinctive knowledge of it and just watching TV or reading the newspaper informs the rest of us. Some people are experienceing chaos in their lives, some are only experiencing stress, but we're all affected, especially the youths. We tell them one thing and we do another, we tell them to keep their chins up and everything will work out fine, at the same time we stockpile guns. We say that it's all in how you look at it and that prophecies are too general to take seriously, at the same time we squirm a little in our seats. We think we are a special generation and at the same time say that things have always been this bad, there just was no TV to show it to everyone. God help us all. We should admit that this whole damn world is out of control. We should admit that it's out of control and that humankind can't fix it. We should get down on our faces and pray for God to help us all, even if you're a doubting Thomas, you should pray to God now and not wait till you're in a foxhole.

"You're good enough for me now and you'll be good enough for me later, I've taken those vows and I plan on keeping them, but

Kids need consistency and security, like knowing that they will be able to watch the Simpsons or some other favorite and equally stupid TV show.

Moses did a lot of things for practical reasons and maybe he paid the price for being too practical. He didn't get to die in the promised land. Jesus did the right thing practical or not, he knew what was productive and what was counterproductive.

Phil's two current favorite singers were either gay or bisexual. They were Melissa Etheridge and Michael Sipe, he had seen Melissa intevued on TV and she had admitted it then. He had just read an article on Sipe at the supermarket this morning where Sipe said he slept with members of both sexes. He was not disappointed, after all it was not surprise, it was just confirmation of what he would have guessed. But like most people, Phil was curious about others sex lives, especially the rich and famous.

"Why don't you get a haircut?", Joey asked his dad. "The way the sides stick out make you look like Bozo the clown."

Phil was a little bit hurt, but answered blithly, "you remember the story of Samson and Delilah, that's why I don't get a haircut more often."

Joey looked at him and laughed, he didn't understand.

"Yeah", Phil thought, "that's a major cause of baldness and weakness, they put constant pressure on men to look bald and since our skull grows, but our scalp just stretches during adulthood, we're bound to have bald spots. Women have them too, but their long hair covers it up. We get so demoralized that the

stress created makes it thin even more, Sampson was smart, he knew that the confidence of a full head of hair would make him feel stronger.

Sharon and Phil were sitting at the breakfast table, "do you want to see my new leather coat?", Sharon asked.

She had gotten a great deal on it at the after Christmas sale. "I don't really need it now, but I'll need one for next year, cause the one I have is getting pretty worn out."

"How can I get to heaven", the rich young man had asked Jesus. Jesus had told him to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor.

Phil laughed to himself. He wasn't rich and he wasn't giving much to the poor, but he and his wife were giving most of their money away. Her to the malls and her relatives and him to his dealers, maybe they qualified as the poor.

"If you looked any worse, you'd belong in a hearse". Phil was thinking of someone else when the thought popped into his head, but at that moment a tall withered old man walked past. "Maybe they're the lucky ones", Phil thought, referring to the corpse in the hearse. At least they had the dying part over with, if they were going anywhere cool, they were probably there by now.

Phil had snuck into heaven through a worm hole that connected the universe of the living to the world of the everlasting. Now he was privy to all the good stuff going on up there, though only till St. Peter's boy's caught on to him and that might not be too far in the future since they were hot on his trail. He had to get away from them.

Here was a world with no locks, no keys, (except at St. Peter's house). He saw a line of people and joined it towards the middle hoping to evade the dream police, Phil never was one to mind cutting. "What's going on?", he asked one of the people in front of him. The man looked very sad and dejected, "don't you know? We're waiting for the 'forget them' pill."

Phil considered this momentarily, but could make no sense of it, "what the hell.. I mean what on earth, *I* mean what in heavens name is a forget them pill?"

The man in front of him looked very surprised, "are you sure you belong in this line, everyone here know's what a forget them pill is!" He turned away and ignored Phil, instead walking a few steps to where the line had advanced.

Phil tried asking the lady behind him, but she was angry about his line jumping and would not even talk to him, besides she was sobbing uncontrollably.

"Geez!" thought Phil, "what the hell's going on here anyway, the sign said Heaven, why's everyone so crabby.

Finally he neared the front of the line and heard the goings on. "Who are you trying to forget", the nurse asked the man in front of Phil. "My whole family", he said sadly, "none of them are here, I was told that they're down there in hell, it's driving me crazy, I've got to take the pill."

"Very well", the nurse said, "open your mouth". The man obliged and she popped an extra large 'forget them' pill in his mouth. He swallowed, closed his eyes and then a great big smile crossed over his face. "How do you feel", the nurse asked.

"Fine, great!", he admitted. "Who were you trying to forget?", she quizzed him. "Shoot, I don't know...", he said a temporary blank look on his face. "Good", nurse Cratchet said with a smile..."next!"

For a second Phil considered reminding the man who he had just forgotten, but then what the heck, no reason to spoil that guy's bliss. "Next!", the nurse said again. Phil took his pill and pretended to swallow, "who did you want to forget?", she asked. "I forget", Phil said with a devilish smile and walked away. "Good", the nurse said, "next!"

It was quite a place this heaven, no need to lock your doors, no need to wear a seatbelt. You could total your car and walk away unscathed, then go to the Mercedes dealer and pick up a new car for free. You played your music as loud as you wanted and no one cared, it didn't bother them. It wasn't boring though, because you could still get sick and have problems, but eventually things worked out or you got better. Actually it was a little boring, things were so predictable. Phil thought it might be interesting to go to hell for a while, actually that's where the pastor had said he belonged.

"Oh, we had problems with women turning over to the other side for the first few hundred years", the Queen bee admitted, "but those undesirable traits have been completely bred out of our ladies".

"The problem now", she went on, "is the Visigoths and other barbarians out there, we have to be on constant alert to fight off their raids and believe me our Amazon warrior women are quite capable of handling those cavemen."

Phil pictured the painting of the rape of the Sabine women, was this a deja vu all over again. The queen went on, "they are digging their own grave though, anytime they kidnap one of our women they are just infusing their uncivilized world with our women's desirable traits. There are lots of crazy colonies out there, but in the end we'll prevail, I know it."

"I've never met woman worth a shit", remarked Vaughn. "I've never met a human being worth a shit", Phil added.

"Yeah, but a woman is always cleaning the house, especially if she's expecting someone to come over and it doesn't matter if the person coming over lives in a pig sty, she still wants to show off her clean house. You know, you really can't have an inside dog and a woman at the same time, she'll constantly be complaining about dog hair and spots on the carpet", Vaughn lamented. "It's one or the other unless you have one of those earthy women and God knows there's a pain in the ass too."

"You know, all they got going for them is that the laws on their side and they hold sex over you like a gun to your head", Phil snapped," and they don't realize how much they overrate that. Any man that would stay with one woman on account of the sex either has no imagination or some kind of chemical imbalance."

Sharon had walked in and heard his last remark, "well that would cover all men, organic brain disease or no imagination!" She just kept on walking through the room, dusting a few things as she passed through stopping just long enough to cast a disgusted look at the two "lazy bums."

Phil thought for a few moments, then expounded his "wisdom". "The problem with women are they're no good at bringing in money, or if they do they spend it all on stupid things. You either get an airhead that can't add two and two, or a bitch like Hillary, who's trying to take what's left of their world away from men."

“Yeah, I think they’re all basically commies anyway”, Vaughn said in agreement. “The best way to make money is to pillage and they’re no good at that. You’ve got to pillage someone to make a decent living, pillage the people, pillage the corporations, pillage the government. How else can a guy get ahead in life.”

Phil snickered, “the only ones they pillage is men and they do it legally, that’s why they like governments and churches so much, cause they’ve legitimized women’s rights and allowed them to pillage from us what we pillage from everyone else.”

“I know!”, Vaughn expounded, “they’re good at cooperating, but not at the pillage, so they want to re-distribute what we earn the good old fashioned way, I don’t know how we got ourselves into this mess.”

Phil pondered again and then, “I was just thinking the other day, you know the founding fathers wouldn’t even be allowed into the debate about how things should be run today. Just look at them, slaveholders, property rightists, anti woman’s suffrage, hell even the first amendment wouldn’t give them the right to participate in the debate today. I mean, I know things have changes and their beliefs are in many ways outdated, but they would be considered insane and maybe not even allowed to express their opinions today and I don’t think that’s a good thing.”

“Like I said”, Phil laughed, “I’ve never seen a good man, a good woman, or even a good dog.

“Yeah, there’s really no such thing as a good man or woman or a bad man or women, we all pretty much suck!”

Phil was cheap alright, first when other means of containment failed he put a harness on the dog and tied a weight to it to keep it from jumping the fence. When the miserable beast jumped anyway and hung itself, causing great damage but not death, Phil made numerous calls to vets all over the city to find who would put it to sleep for the least money. This from the same guy that turns the soap over in the shower if he’s left a hair on it instead of bothering to remove it, this from the same guy that wears a condom because he doesn’t trust his wife. (it’s just a story!)

Phil listened intently to the news, it disturbed him greatly. The war in the Balkans was heating up and it looked like Russia which by the way was imploding might join in on the side of their Serbian allies. He noticed that as usual, the two people in the room who possibly had the most to loose by the possibility of a wider war, were not paying any attention to the news. His son who would be draft age in a couple of years and his wife who would suffer horribly if she were to loose her only son in such a war, were oblivious to the events unfolding before them. As has always been true of mothers and sons they were to absorbed in their own day to day affairs to realize what devil might be waiting for them around the next bend. Motorcycles and shiny floors, ski trips, peer pressure and natural healing were where they were at and rightly so. At this stage, the worrying was to be done by the fathers, the men who watched events, debated and tried to do the right thing, but who doomed by fate, were walking down the same sordid path that had consumed there forefathers. The cache of good sense and reliable judgement we all thought we owned had proven once again to be as worthless as the paper we called money and the truths we extolled from our ivory towers.

“Hold me darling, hold me”, she said weakly as the breath left her lungs for the last time.

Phil lay down his queen and her eyes closed like a dolls eyes do when you lay it down, it was symbolic of defeat, it was the end of everything in the world that was good.

“I don’t like niggers and Chinese”, Phil told Sharon and she looked surprised, even shocked to hear him toaking that way.

“What”, he said smiling, “it’s the beer talking.” He knew better, she probably did too, but why did he dislike them. For one thing, he knew that a lot of “them” didn’t like him and that so it was kind of a vice versa thing. Of course “they” hadn’t ever done anything to him and although his people may have, he didn’t think he’d ever done anything bad to “them.”

On another level though, he saw them as out competing “his” people and since he tended to look at things rather long term, he saw them as a threat to what he held dear, whatever the hell that was, since he typically wasn’t too fond of lots of “his” people too. Maybe he just feared a future world where the people would look, act and live more like “them” than like “us”, but he tried to “rise” above such prejudices and frequently he saw things in a different light.

Phil wasn’t mad at Sharon, he was just waxing philosophical, “you gals just ain’t much good” he thought to himself. “You do nothing but bitch and take our money and God knows you stink to high heaven, especially after sex, which by the way you think is such a great gift, but actually it’s not much different or better than jacking off.” He continued his internal tirade, “the pies and cakes are fine, but I can get better food at a store or restaurant than you can ever make, so all in all, the only hold you’ve got on us is the one you’ve stolen by way of the vote - just another reason for the tea to go in the harbor again.”

Phil was of course mistaken as a woman basher and to any extent you wanted it was true, but on the other hand, had not men been disenfranchised to the max in the last hundred years. It made sense that women and minorities would hate whities, after all he had stomped on just about everyone at one time or another and maybe it was time for him to get a good dose of his own medicine, in any case it looked inevitable. But good men were still out there, they still knew that the cost of freedom was the threat of death and one day maybe a remnant of them would stand up for what was right. Might makes right when arguments fail to persuade and despite it’s sorry current state, it was possible that “the man” would get his shit together and take back what his lackey male ancestors had been foolish enough to give away. All that tree of liberty crap was true and if you’re not ready, willing and able to defend your liberties, there is always someone ready, willing and able to steal it from you.

Is it worse to spend your lives hoping your mate will have an ‘accident’ to free you, or to leave your mate because things are so damn stale that neither of you are fond of the other anymore?

What Phil needed was a very basic type of mating ritual, so that the reptilian part of his brain could take over, then he might actually be able to handle romance. Wouldn’t it be great if the human female would come into season and display her availability, followed by ritualistic combat by the males for her favors. Ooops, he thought, that already seemed to be the case in human society, it just occurred primarily at the single bars instead of under rocks or in the slime. He was not very good at the game, call him Haunch-erelli or Humplestiltskin, but his romantic streak was not deep enough to allow him to compete successfully against the silver tongued devils that abounded.

“I feel like I’m somewhere between your sidekick and your beast of burden”, Phil said.

“I can’t say that in my arms is the last place you want to be, but it’s certainly not at the top of the list.”

“Neither of us has put the other first or even second or third in this marriage and that’s not very good.”

“I have wanted an intimate physical relationship with you, while you have had other priorities, maybe that’s typical in a marriage, maybe it’s not, but it has made it feel at times like I’m serving time. I’m not the greatest lover, in fact I’m probably way down the list, so I don’t blame you, but the facts on the ground remain the same. If we are soul mates, then I’m baffled by it all, which isn’t surprising since I’m learning that nothing works as advertised and nothing goes as planned.”

Where we go from here, is any ones guess...I suppose, I should tell you how I feel, but by tomorrow, I’ll probably feed a different way, at least for a while. Do I owe it to you to tell you, so that you can go your own way, while you’re still young, or should I live this lie so that I can experience seeing my kids growing up, instead of just paying support etc., as deny it or not you have threatened in the past. We have made our bed and will lie in it, whether we’ll like in it together is another story.

I can bemoan that once you tried black you could never go back, at least not back to me, but that’s just part of the story. There have been lots of other circumstances in our lives that made it turn out this way and we can work through them and be miserable or happy as clams, the choice is ours and depends on what we want to get out of life and what we want to put into our marriage.

I can keep asking you how your day was and how was your walk and try to listen, you can keep asking me what’s wrong and doing your wifely chore every other week, but is that what it’s all about? Do we talk about it, that’s what you’d want, that’s what you’d say I owe you, but would it change anything, would it just make things worse for me, for you, do I try to work through it this way?

...Good morning, it’s a new day and I have a “better” attitude. Regarding yesterday, there’s no need to apologize, you want the truth don’t you, but I’m a kinder gentler fellow this day. Yes, I will admit we had sex this morning, but I had already softened my stance, the act of writing yesterday helped me think things through, it usually does. Don’t tell your daughter to use sex to soften her man, just tell her that it works, for just a little while, but it doesn’t change any of the underlying issues. My repeat of the truism once you try black you’ll never go back, stands for whatever it’s worth, I don’t know, you, I suppose do.

I was thinking about the things I’ll say and the way I’ll feel if my kids, daughter especially “goes black”, after all, they are being indoctrinated as never before. This morning on the Sunday news show they were showing off wedding gowns and had black and white models, in every case that I saw, they mixed the races. Well, I don’t know what I’ll say or how I’ll feel, but in this mornings mood, I think I’d say, I care about you very much daughter and son and want you to marry the person you fall in love with most. It may be difficult for me to accept that you choose a black man or woman, but I realize I have to accept it, because you are the most important people in my life. I hope you think things out and pray hard for guidance and then I’ll do my best to love and support you, your spouse and your children there’s nothing else I can or should do.